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Thursday March 21 1996

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The Guardian INTERNATIONAL

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Brickies, booze and brothels

The Brits in Berlin

G2 with European weather

'It's delicious. I have no worries about eating beefburgers. There is no cause for concern'

- John Gummer, Agriculture Minister, speaking in May 1990 as he and his four-year-old daughter, Cordelia, sample beefburgers

New York Stories

Has 'the Oddfather' lost his marbles?

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OnLine

Not just nerds: special Net survey

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Beef warning sparks panic

Many millions in potential danger

Paul Brown, Rebecca Smithers and Sarah Boseley

EMERGENCY measures were promised yesterday to tighten controls on beef production. Government's announcement that 10 young people are believed to have been infected by a variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease after eating meat infected with "mad cow disease".

Government experts later said that evidence gained in the past few months from deaths among the victims showed that everyone in the United Kingdom who had eaten beef in the decade before 1989 may be in danger. The admission that bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) may be transmitted to humans is a complete reversal of the position the Government has stood by for a decade.

There were clear signs of crisis management as first the Health Secretary and then the Agriculture Minister

delivered statements to the Commons.

John Major was told of the new findings from scientists on the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (Seac) on Monday, Downing Street said. They prompted an hour-long unscheduled meeting of the Cabinet yesterday morning.

Stephen Dorrell, the Health Secretary, told MPs that although there remained "no scientific proof" that BSE can be transmitted to man by beef, scientists had concluded that "the most likely explanation" for 10 cases involving a new strain of CJD was exposure to BSE before the offal ban in 1989.

Douglas Hogg, the Agriculture Minister, swiftly followed with a statement detailing fresh safeguards for slaughterhouses and animal feeds to ensure that the risk to humans was "minimised".

In the absence of detailed guidelines for people who eat about beef, he assured MPs that "British beef can be eaten with confidence" and that he would still do so.

Beef producers, burger chains and supermarkets insisted they needed more details of the findings before they could comment, and stressed their quality controls. The Meat and Livestock Commission said there was nothing to show that BSE had appeared in muscle tissue, as opposed to offal and bone.

A junior Scottish minister, the Earl of Lindsay, said the Government had to bear some blame for failing to pay farmers full compensation for slaughtering infected animals in the late 1980s. "We possibly unwittingly allowed the temptation that some farmers may have succumbed to," he told peers.

Ministers sought to assure the public that eating beef



John Niven, a farmer in Glogaburn, Perthshire, cast down by yesterday's government announcement. The Scottish beef trade is worth £500m a year

PHOTOGRAPH: MURDO MACLEOD



had become progressively safer since the controls introduced in 1989. These were imposed in response to the appearance of BSE in cattle that had, in the early 80s, consumed feed containing the brains of sheep suffering from scrapie - another form of the disease.

However, ministers opted for the formula that the risk in eating beef was extremely small, rather than that there was no risk at all.

Mr Dorrell and Mr Hogg said the risk from beef was now "extremely small". Controls to strip out and destroy offal which might be infected with BSE were begun in 1989 and have been progressively improved. Even tighter controls were brought in yesterday in an attempt to reassure the public that the multi-million-pound British beef industry was a safe one.

All 10 people identified as having a new, human form of

BSE were aged under 42 and had been killed in the past few months.

The acknowledgment of a possible large-scale public health problem came during a press conference with Seac scientists after the Commons statements. Professor John Pattison, head of the Government's committee, said doctors were being urged to look out for the disease. "We have asked for intense surveillance so we can measure the scale

of the problem over the coming months and years."

The main concern is for the millions who ate beef in the 1980s before the controls were brought in. Prof Pattison said the incubation period of the new disease was typically five to 15 years. That was why the first cases of the new illness had not shown up until 1994, when six were diagnosed. There were four more in 1995. The new illness was known only in the United Kingdom,

the only place which suffered from an epidemic of "mad cow disease".

Because of the age of those who have died, SEAC will consider over the weekend, at the government's request,

whether young people may be more susceptible.

Sketch, page 2; History of a disease, page 4; Leader comment, page 8; Pig in the middle, page 9

THE VICTIMS: Depression, tremors, loss of balance and a dreadful decline

Vicky Rimmer

VICKY RIMMER (right), aged 18, a kennel worker from Connaught Quay, Clwyd, North Wales, has been in a vegetative coma at Deeside Community Hospital for the past three years. She was the first known teenage victim of CJD when she fell ill in 1993.

The once vibrant schoolgirl does not move and has lost all powers of recognition and speech. Her family has consistently blamed her condition on meat infected with BSE, specifically hamburgers.

She was still at school when she began to feel tremors in her hands and to lose her balance.

Her symptoms, in common with other CJD sufferers, grew progressively worse.

After being referred to hospital, she underwent biopsy tests, which were carried out by scientists from the CJD surveillance unit at Edinburgh.

Her mother, Beryl, was eventually taken aside by a



neurologist, who said that he was "terribly sorry" to have to inform her that her daughter had contracted CJD. Shortly afterwards she slipped into a coma.

Every year since then, her family have held a party for Vicky's friends at her hospital bedside on her birthday.

"I have always believed that beefburgers caused CJD in Vicky, and I hold the Government responsible for the way in which they have tried to deceive the public," Mrs Rimmer said yesterday.

Peter Hall

PETER HALL (right), a vegetarian, of Chester-le-Street, Co Durham, was 20 when he died last month after suffering from CJD for two years. His parents claim he contracted the disease before giving up meat.

An environmental studies student at Sunderland University, he was a keen musician with a heavy metal group but first showed signs of depression around Christmas 1994. His hands trembled, he lost his footing coming down stairs and swayed unsteadily when he walked.

He soon appeared to lose all co-ordination and much of his short-term memory. Within five months of the first symptoms, he was confined to a wheelchair.

Transferred to hospitals in Newcastle and then a local care home, he continued to deteriorate. In the final stages, thin and suffering from dementia, he contracted a series of chest infections.

Throughout his illness,



the doctors had dismissed suggestions that he was suffering from CJD.

The results of his post-mortem, proving that Peter died of CJD, only came through late on Tuesday night, on the eve of the Government's announcement.

Derek Hall, his father, said: "Hopefully public opinion will force the Government to do something to stop infected meat getting into the food chain. We believe infected beef-burgers killed our son and something has to be done."

Ann Richardson

ANN RICHARDSON (right), a health care assistant and mother of one, from Huyton, Merseyside, was 41 when she died in January this year, two years after being diagnosed as suffering from depression.

Over those two years she gradually lost co-ordination, and she became bedridden. Her husband, Ronny, always believed her condition had been contracted through eating BSE infected meat.

The final proof that she had been suffering from CJD came only yesterday in a letter from the medical surveillance unit at Edinburgh.

The note confirmed that in her case there was no genetic history of similar degenerative diseases.

"If the Government had been up front, we would have stopped eating beef. They kept it under wraps to protect the beef industry."

Profiles by Owen Boucott and Alan Watkins



ment denied a link between beef and the disease when we knew it was the only way she could have contracted it."

"My wife died from CJD and medical evidence proves she was not born with it, so where did she get it from? Why weren't we told there might be a link?"

"If the Government had been up front, we would have stopped eating beef. They kept it under wraps to protect the beef industry."

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Sketch

Nothing rare in steak debate



Simon Hoggart

THE Government has learned some humility over Mad Cow Disease. There was a time when ministers would have wanted to greet the latest BSE scare by opening the dispatch box and pulling out stacks of burgers to force down the throats of sycophantic backbenchers. Yesterday Stephen Dorrell, the Health Secretary, was calm, measured and cautious. "We must not over-react," he said, "just as we must not under-react."

"She has as much chance of getting CJD as she has of being re-elected to the shadow cabinet," he scoffed. This may be true. Ms Harman is unpopular on her own side (thanks only in part to her choice of school for her son), but is reviled on the other. Like Nelson Mandela, she is the loneliest Harman. Mr Dorrell carefully declined to say whether his own children would be eating beef. He also declined to say what his own opinion was. "This is not the time for a lay minister to offer his views," he suggested modestly. (Though this was not quite as modest as it looked. Like so many politicians' statements, it had a sub-text. In this case: "I'm not going to make an idiot of myself like that prancing prat Gummer.")

Regulator squeezes 'excess profit' in 4-year regime that pegs price movement to inflation less 7pc

BT told to cut phone bills

AVERAGE phone bills should fall from £50 to £30 a quarter by the end of the century under proposed new price controls for British Telecom published yesterday. Don Cruickshank, the industry regulator, said BT's main prices should continue to fall as the group became more efficient and increased its business. He is proposing that for four years from

August 1997 prices be cut by between 5 and 9 per cent below the rate of inflation. Mr Cruickshank, director-general of OfTel, said that by 2001 BT would be making excessive operating profits on the regulated part of its business of about £1.5 billion a year. He was determined to squeeze out the excess and pass it on to customers. He forecast that by 2001 BT's share of the phone calls market could drop to between 60 and 70 per cent as new operators challenged the group's current near monopoly of local phone networks.

By the time the new controls started in August 1997, cable companies would cover 60 per cent of the population and Ionica would have launched radio links. John Butler, BT's head of regulatory affairs, said the regulator was being wildly optimistic as to what could be achieved. He warned that further price cuts would limit investment in the group's network and information superhighway services. OfTel's second consultative paper on how to control BT's prices when the current controls end recommends not

only continued price caps for most of the group's retail services but limits on what it charges other operators for use of its network. OfTel yesterday put forward several options including reducing the price review period from four to two years. However, Mr Cruickshank said he favoured a "steady as we go" approach with prices pegged at about 7 per cent below inflation for four years. At the moment BT has to cut a basket of retail prices annually by 7.5 per cent below inflation, equivalent to about £450 million a year.

The regulator is stepping up pressure on BT by insisting that the new price controls be part of a package which gives him sweeping powers to crack down on anti-competitive behaviour. BT is adamant that the new powers should be offset by checks and balances, including an appeal procedure. It has indicated it would be prepared to risk the Monopolies Commission investigation which would be triggered by a rejection of the OfTel package. Mr Butler said his board was coming under pressure from shareholders to take a

tougher stance in its dealings with OfTel, and he noted that the directors would have to take a final decision on the package just before the group's annual meeting. A spokeswoman for the National Consumer Council said: "It is excellent news that the regulator has not buckled under pressure from the industry to lift the price cap. But the extent to which prices will fall will depend upon how BT juggles prices within the price cap." 3 million new cards, Notebook, page 11



Sir Patrick Sheehy: quit as chairman three months ago



Sir Richard Doll: will oppose move fiercely

Cambridge row over tobacco sponsorship

EDWARD Pilkington CAMBRIDGE has become the latest university to get embroiled in controversy over commercial sponsorship after it agreed to allow the world's second largest international tobacco company to endorse a professorship. A plan to set up the Sir Patrick Sheehy Chair of International Relations, named after the former chairman of BAT Industries, makers of Benson and Hedges, Silk Cut and Lucky Strike cigarettes, has aroused fury among doctors and health campaigners. Last year the company made record profits from tobacco sales of £1.56 billion.

The dispute is likely to fuel the debate about the propriety of commercial sponsorships, coming a week after dons at Balliol College, Oxford, accepted a Chair in European Thought donated by Dr Gertrudis Flick, grandson of a Nazi war criminal. Under Cambridge's proposed package, BAT would donate £1.6 million towards the setting up of the professorship and a bursary for inner-city undergraduates. In return, the university would pay for two post-doctoral appointments and four scholarships for students from developing countries, all bearing the tobacco company's name.



Cambridge: smoking sponsorship controversy catches fire

Keith Ball, of the anti-smoking campaign, ASH, said he was appalled Cambridge was even considering the plan. "Why is one of our most prestigious universities aligning itself with merchants of death?" Other protests have come from the Duke of Gloucester, who is chairman of the Cancer Research Campaign, and Sir Walter Bodmer, head of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, who slammed the proposal as a "cynical public relations exercise". The university is to make a final decision on whether to accept the BAT endorsement in May. If it agrees to go ahead, opponents are expected to force a ballot of all teaching staff later that month. A spokesman for BAT denied it was encouraging smoking in the developing world and rejected claims that its sponsorship schemes were manipulative. Sir Patrick Sheehy, who retired as BAT chairman three months ago, was unavailable for comment.

Review

Daft hypotheses deconstructed

Robert Yates

Modern Problems in Science Bloomsbury Theatre THE problems are both the name and the business of the act, a trio of improvisers from Chicago who deal in unlikely hypotheses. The "Sixty of Turin" may be used to predict baseball scores, say, or "John, Paul, George and Ringo are the fundamental units of the genetic code." According to the conceit which governs the evening, the three cast themselves as professors. We, the audience, serve as their students, our task to suggest an academic discipline for each of the "profs", and to come up with the daft hypotheses. One suggestion seems, but not quite daft enough. The trio — a hit at Edinburgh the last two years, and appearing in Bloomsbury in honour of Science Week — might pride themselves on never resisting a challenge, but they turned mute at one audience suggestion. "How is it possible to talk nonsense for two hours and get paid?" They obviously took it as criticism, when really all the inquirer wanted was some tips for success. Perhaps they judge "nonsense" a little harshly. Maybe in honour of the scientific method, they are just applying a little counter-intuition. The

story goes that two of the team, Dick Costello and Phil Granchi, got tired of the lack of openings in the theatre for scientists. Their solution was to create a comedy troupe, Fulcher, and lend a comedy spin to the growth industry of popularising science. A sort of three-man Stephen Hawking, with jokes. Some of the time. The problem is that the book can be more restrictive than it is liberating. Tonight's hypothesis, "Amanda (audience member) is not here", was considered by the trio in the guises of doctor, oceanographer and taxidermist, and proved to be one of those lectures where the "students" catch up on their sleep. The "character acting" is fine — the consistent thread is the personae the three play: respectively, old buffer, jargon fiend and young footnoter — but the pride they take in finding unseen connections has insufficient payoff. The pleasure in their invention soon palls, when the gags fail to come. "No discipline needed" would be the verdict on their report card, since, when they quicken up in the second half, and set time limits — prove a thesis in three minutes rather than in an hour — the fun begins. We finally get to see their minds moving. But for most of the evening, the science-culture divide seemed as wide as ever. This review appeared in later editions yesterday.

PM attacks 'patronising Labour rubbish'

Major contrasts Tory 'choice' with Opposition 'we know best'

Michael White and John Carvel

JOHN MAJOR yesterday staked his claim to a fifth Tory term in government by contrasting his own underdog's commitment to "opportunity and choice" for ordinary voters with what he disparaged as Labour's condescending and do-gooding attitudes. He called such attitudes "patronising rubbish." The real political divide was between opportunity and politically correct opportunism — "undermining opportunity by

destroying choice and independence in favour of a patronising 'we know best' attitude," he said. "But I don't view people without position or money from some lofty pedestal. I am one of them. I remember their hopes and the obstacles in their way," the former Brixton boy declared. "Their hopes are as varied as the leaves on the trees." In a much-travelled address to the Westminster think-tank, the Prime Minister made educational opportunity the centrepiece of his appeal. Although promising further reforms, he said: "Evolution, not revolution, is our watchword." There was no commitment to go beyond Education Secretary Gillian Shephard's announcement in January that schools may be allowed to select up to 15 per cent of pupils without government approval — an increase from the present 10 per cent. The Prime Minister also attacked familiar targets like the European social chapter as a destroyer of jobs, extolled home ownership, and promised that ministers will soon produce a solution for families who have to sell homes to pay for long-term care for themselves or elderly relatives. "We're looking closely at how we can help them meet those costs," said Mr Major, who renewed his pledge to abolish inheritance tax. Some

advisers believe he is poised to endorse a scheme which would require people to sell their homes, but allow them to keep the capital for their children, using only the interest to pay care bills. Mr Major spoke after a special Cabinet session had heard the party chairman, Brian Mawhinney, lay out the prospects for the coming election campaign and the "feel-good" themes ministers must trumpet if the Tories are to regain up to 30 points of voter support lost to Labour. The Prime Minister's speech attempted to touch emotional chords with attacks on Tony Blair's revamped Labour Party, little different from Old Labour, in Mr Major's view. He singled out "progressive education"

— self-expression and no tests — as a "crippling folly" which had betrayed the very children it was meant to help. He defended "a spectrum of schools," including selective ones — used by Mr Blair and Harriet Harman, he noted, as well as the assisted places scheme. His stance goaded Labour's deputy leader, John Prescott, who left school even younger than Mr Major, at 15, to protest last night that the Prime Minister's vision was one of "a nation of handouts" instead of a nation at work. Pledging the Tories to cut taxes and foster independence, Mr Major insisted that he was fighting political correctness. "It's easy to be warm-hearted with other people's money," he said.

all teaching staff later that month. A spokesman for BAT denied it was encouraging smoking in the developing world and rejected claims that its sponsorship schemes were manipulative. Sir Patrick Sheehy, who retired as BAT chairman three months ago, was unavailable for comment.

Parent killers face death

Christopher Reed in Los Angeles

LYLE and Erik Menendez, the Beverly Hills rich boys who shot dead their parents, have been found guilty of murder by a jury in Los Angeles in their second trial, six years and seven months after the killings. The verdict, which found "special circumstances" in that the brothers conspired and had laid in wait, could bring the death penalty to be decided at a special hearing. Otherwise they get 25 years in prison. Hollywood music firm executive José Menendez, aged 45, and his former beauty queen wife Kitty, aged 47, were found in pools of blood in their mansion after being shot 15 times with 12-bore shotguns. At first Lyle, now aged 28, and Erik, 25, suggested it was a mafia execution, and went on a million dollar spending spree. They bought Rolex watches to attend the funeral, invested in a restaurant and acquired flashy sports cars. But only weeks before the first trial opened in 1993, they admitted to the murders in what became known as the "abuse excuse." They claimed that their father, with their mother's knowledge, sexually abused them through their childhood and with Erik into his teenage years. They threatened to go public with the charges of threat that created such tension that they were frightened for their own lives, and killed out of this fear. The prosecution argued that it was simple greed — the brothers wanted the \$10 million (£10 million) fortune their father was to leave them, money that has now been spent on legal and other costs while the brothers were in jail. Separate juries for each brother were unable to agree on a verdict in the first trial, which ended in January, 1994. In the second trial the brothers had a much more difficult time presenting their abuse excuse. Judge Stanley Weisberg decided that the defence had shown insufficient evidence that the young men had killed out of duress and fear. This precluded Lyle Menendez from repeating his tearful testimony from the first trial, a performance that had a significant impact on his jury. That jury was divided, with the women seeking a conviction for manslaughter only, and the men demanding a murder verdict. This time one jury of eight men and four women judged both cases. The defence also faced risks in presenting Lyle again. After the last trial it was revealed that he had tried to coach witnesses to lie, a charge that could have been put to him. Prosecutors also kept out 30 witnesses from the brothers' circle of friends, relatives and relatives who were to offer sympathetic portrayals.

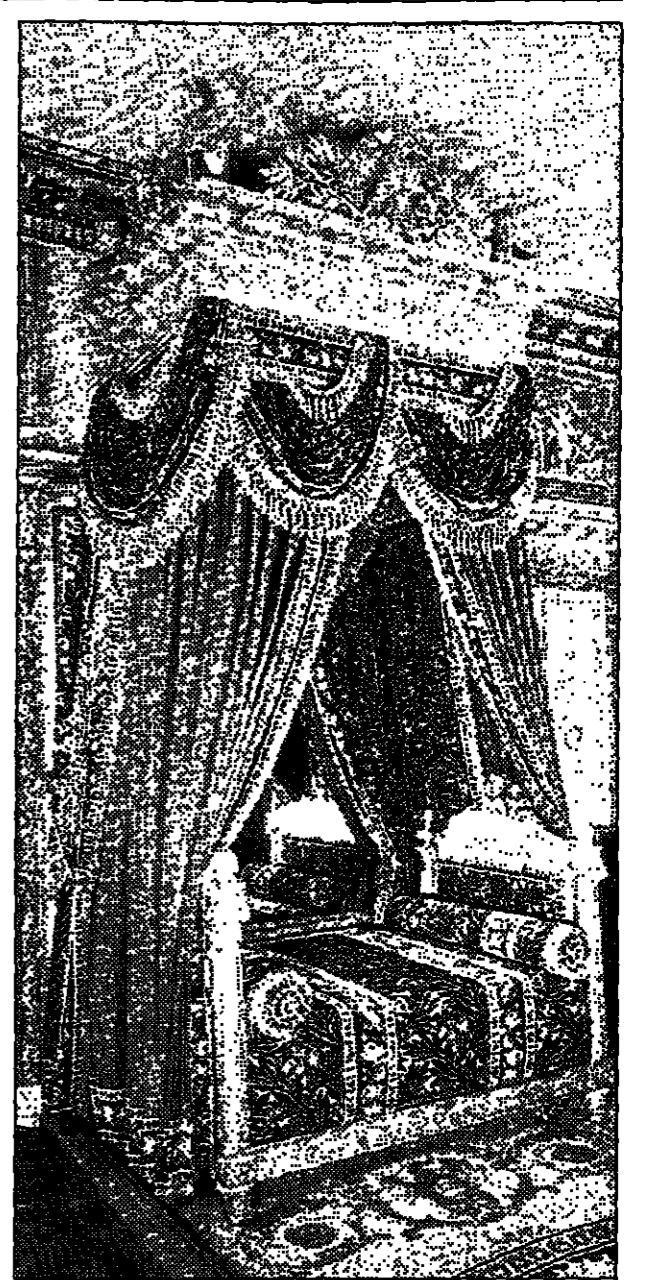
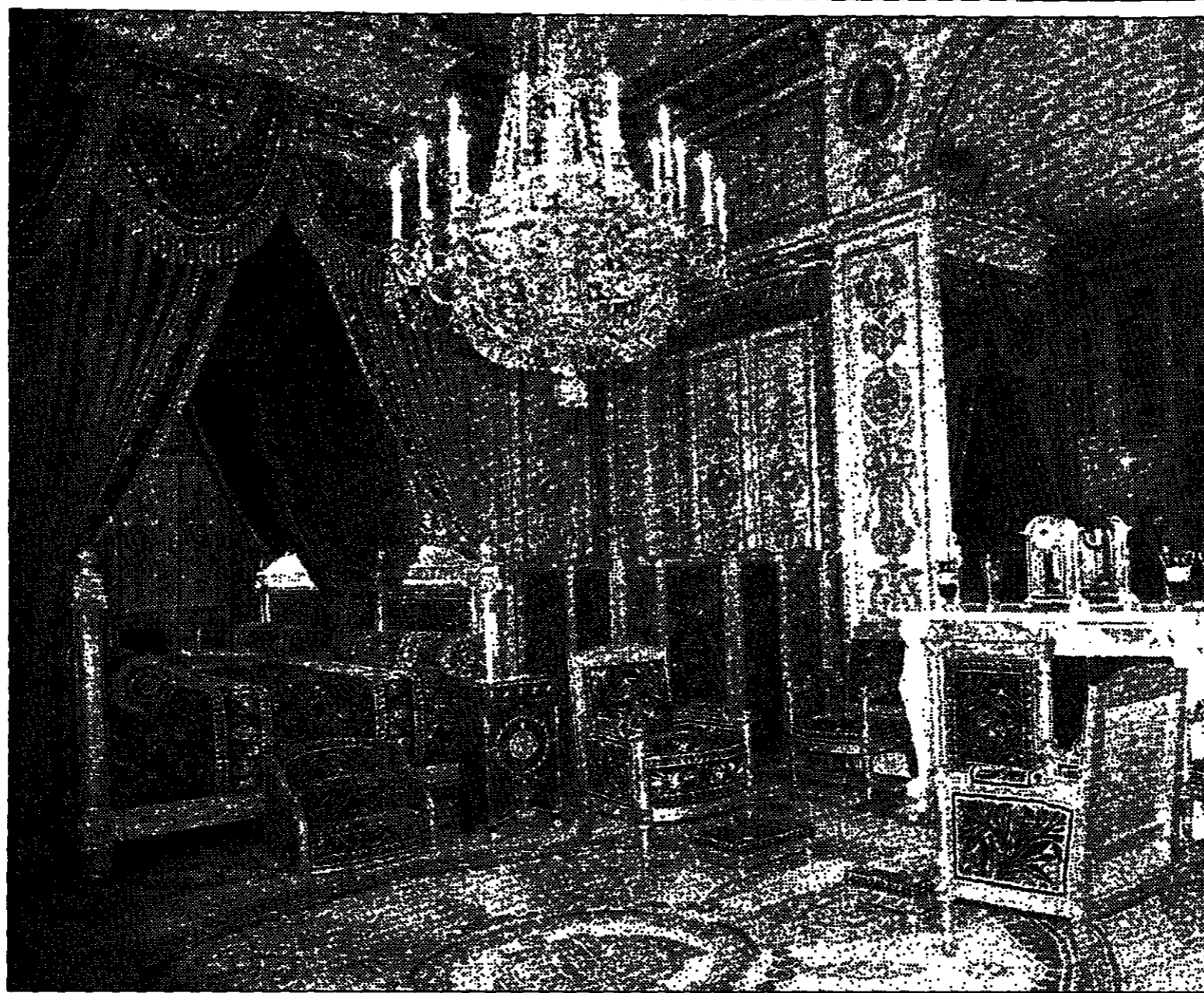
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e bills



Twenty-five year labour of love sees royal chateau which saw the rise and fall of Bonaparte restored to its original splendour

Paul Webster in Fontainebleau



Not tonight... Lavish furnishings were used in the renovation of the emperor's sleeping room (left), and a gilded imperial eagle was restored above his magnificent bed

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: JACQUES BRINON

ANDRE Malraux's dream of restoring the royal chateau in the centre of this city south of Paris will finally come true this weekend when Napoleon Bonaparte's renovated apartments are again opened to the public.

Completion of the suite of six rooms is the culmination of 25 years of restoration work on the chateau under a plan instituted by the writer Malraux, one of his last acts as President De Gaulle's culture minister from 1960-69.

The chateau "has links with all French sovereigns since St Louis in the 13th century". Amaury Lefebvre, the chateau's curator, told a VIP tour before tomorrow's opening.

But it is particularly impregnated with Napoleon's influence. The emperor used what are called the interior apartments as campaign headquarters after his military school was established in the building in 1803.

He said the rooms "are marked by some of the most important events of the First Empire, although Napoleon only stayed here for a total of 170 days between 1804 and 1814". Bonaparte took over a

suite of private rooms used by Louis XVI and met Pope Pius VII there in 1804 just before his coronation as emperor. But other visits by Bonaparte coincided with disasters, including the aftermath of defeat in Russia and preparations for exile in Elba. In April 1814 he signed an abdication document before officially taking leave of his army in the chateau's courtyard.

The imperial waiting rooms, bathroom and private drawing rooms are sumptuously furnished, but they look almost ordinary in comparison to the emperor's bedroom and private office. In these rooms, rare faded tapestry and chair coverings have been re-woven in their original colours and a huge gilded imperial eagle has been restored above a magnificent bed.

"It is difficult to assess the cost because it has been spread over 25 years, most in the last eight years, but even the woven decorations over the bed are worth more than £1,000 a metre," Mr Lefebvre said. The completion of Malraux's 25-year plan has not ended Mr Lefebvre's worries for the chateau, which attracts about 400,000 visitors a year. Restoration work of 25 years ago shows signs of wear and new funds to start all over again have yet to be approved.

Howard wants 3-year minimum for 3-time burglars

Plans would demand 12 jails and add 10,000 to prison population

Alan Travis Home Affairs Editor

BURGLARS convicted a third time will be automatically sentenced to three years in prison under US-style plans for stiff minimum sentences to be revealed by the Home Secretary shortly.

The forthcoming white paper on sentencing, which has already provoked criticism, also proposes that convicted dealers in class A drugs such as heroin and cocaine face a minimum prison term of at least six years. Confirmation that judges' discretion in sentencing some of the 13,000 burglars who are imprisoned each year is to be limited by the introduction of minimum sentences will reopen Michael Howard's debate with the senior judiciary, which has run over

the past five months. Home Office ministers Lord Widcombe and David Maclean will meet the Parole Board today to hear their concerns.

In response to complaints that sentences are already too tough, Mr Howard says: "I've got a simple answer. If you don't want the time, don't do the crime." The expected three-year minimum for burglars is double the average sentence of 17.6 months currently handed down by the crown courts to those who have 10 or more previous burglary convictions.

Ministers hope to publish the white paper before the Commons rises for the Easter Recess in a fortnight.

It is expected to say that the two proposals, new minimum sentences for repeat burglars and drug dealers, will add about 10,000 a year to the current prison population of 53,300. The extra 12 prisons needed to house them could cost up to £1.1 billion. In the face of these costs the Treasury is insisting that Mr Howard announces that the white paper sentencing proposals be phased in over several years.

His plan to give automatic "discretionary life" sentences to rapists and other violent criminals who offend is likely to be adopted first as it would not have an immediate impact on the prison population.

The white paper will also propose: That judges be given the

discretion to decide whether time spent by the prisoner in custody on remand should count towards the final sentence, dependent on whether the accused has "strung out" his or her defence.

This will meet concerns of the Lord Chancellor and the Home Office to develop sentence discounts and plea bargaining to end the backlog of cases before the courts.

The introduction of "honesty into sentencing" by abolishing automatic remission of up to 50 per cent of a sentence. At present most inmates are released after serving only half their sentence. This will be restricted to around 15 to 20 per cent

remission, which will have to be earned by good behaviour inside. It will require a huge expansion of the prison discipline system. The Lord Chief Justice, Lord Taylor, is expected to issue a "practice direction" to judges to ensure that their sentencing takes account of the abolition of early release.

Council tax bills to rise by 6pc

James Melke Community Affairs Editor

COUNCIL tax payers in England face 6.2 per cent increases in their bills next year — twice the level of inflation — as ministers make them bear more of the cost of local government. Levies for two adults living in a band D property — homes worth between £68,000 and £88,000 — will average 6.7, the Government said yesterday.

Rises in inner London will be 10.4 per cent, outer London 5.1 per cent, other metropolitan areas 6.8 per cent and shire counties 5.9 per cent. Party leaders used the figures to fire the first shots in campaigns for local government elections in May, with Brian Mawhinney, the Conservative Party chairman, criticising "disgraceful" local authority tax hikes.

He said band D charges were £225 a year, or £16 a week, higher in Labour-run councils, and £12 a week higher in Liberal Democrat councils. The Tories used those councils where one party was responsible for setting all the council tax, disregarding whether areas where Labour or the Liberal Democrats were in control of one tier. Figures to be published by the influential Local Government Chronicle tomorrow, including authorities where the Tories are the largest single party and where they do not control both tiers, suggest narrower differences — of just over £134 a year at band D.

Council tax bills might even be lower in Labour areas, £525.48, compared with £525.48, because typically they have fewer expensive houses. Labour's Frank Dobson condemned the "judicial" system that determined the amounts local authorities were given in grants and how much they needed to raise through council tax.

The "Tory funding fiddle" meant nearly all Westminster council's spent was met by the Government, leaving the authority to levy the lowest council tax, at £295 for band D payers. "If every council got the same help per head of population, 94 per cent would not have to collect council tax at all. They'd be able to pay out rebates instead."

The row overshadowed publication by the Audit Commission of league tables for council services last year. Local authorities with poor records improved sharply, but there was little change among average performers. The commission's figures confirmed wide disparity in council services, even based on need and geography.

Mr Dobson said the council tax rises were "so driven by grant considerations as to be not much use. The Government has undoubtedly rigged these." David Rendell, for the Liberal Democrats, also condemned the help given the Tory London boroughs of Wandsworth, and Kensington and Chelsea, while pointing out that Westminster, even with its grant, had set a tax far lower than its chief executive deemed prudent.

Andrew Foster, controller of the Audit Commission, said: "Overall, most councils are providing a good service at reasonable cost but there are some who fall well short of what by most standards would be seen as desirable."

Romance makes spendthrifts of post-festive pennypinchers

Larry Elliott Economics Editor

LOVERS once content to toss it with flowers are now more likely to say it with plastic as they splash out on Valentine's Day for a candlelit meal à deux or a night of passion in a posh hotel. A dozen red roses or a big box of chocolates are no longer lavish enough on February 14 for Britain's new generation of romantics, according to a report into spending patterns released yesterday. It found consumers racking up debt in restaurants, clubs and hotels at a time when they were cutting back on all other spending.

Figures from the Credit Card Research Group showed that only entertainment and hotels escaped the February belt-tightening that always follows the extravagance of Christmas and the New Year sales. Spending in hotels was 10 per cent higher than in January and spending on entertainment up by 3 per cent, the group said. It lobbies on behalf of the main credit and debit card issuers. Data from the Government yesterday indicated that retail sales — which exclude restaurants and hotels — were up by 0.6 per cent in February, after a fall of a similar size in January. Elizabeth Phillips, director

of the group, said: "People tend to be more frugal in February, but it seems that Britain is turning into a nation of romantics." The only other explanation was that men remained as stingy as ever, and the surge in card spending was due to women taking advantage of the leap year to woo their reluctant boyfriend on February 29.

High street sales rebound, Notebook, page 11

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This tribe of post-industrial gypsies inhabit a netherworld of drifters and dreamers, of wild ambition and burnt-out despair, of generosity and betrayal, of sharks and scams and easy violence. Fortunes, large and small, are being made and lost on what is Europe's and perhaps the world's biggest building site.

300 30 300

Scientists yet to discover how disease is transmitted to humans • Consumer confidence paramount, says NFU

Twists and turns on trail of a killer

Since 1985, BSE has spread to mice, cats and ostriches

Tim Radford
Science Editor

IN 1985, a previously healthy dairy cow suddenly became edgy and unco-ordinated, then aggressive and unpredictable. Its brain was found to be riddled with holes, like a sponge. The disease was given a name in 1986 and by 1987, there were 20 known cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy or BSE or Mad Cow Disease in Britain. By the summer of 1988, there were 731 reported cases on 550 farms in Britain and the Channel Islands.

Scientists already knew four things about BSE. It was remarkably like scrapie, which had only been known to occur in sheep, and Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, or CJD, which worldwide kills about one person per million a year. It was also like mink encephalopathy and kuru, a disease of a group of tribesmen in Papua-New Guinea, who ritually ate human brains, all these diseases are marked by

'The open window for infection to pass to man from 1985 to 1989 was closed'

tel-tale loss of co-ordination and degeneration of the brain. The Ministry of Agriculture made BSE a notifiable disease, at the same time declaring that there was no risk to humans. Thus began a pattern of ambivalent signals which continued until yesterday afternoon.

Infected cattle were slaughtered and the sale of all beef thymus, spleen, tonsils, spine and glands was banned. But ministers repeatedly assured the public and foreign markets that the risk of transmission to humans was negligible.

Campaigners however said that no one understood how the BSE was transmitted. Secondly, the eruption of the disease was linked with the practice of feeding cattle with the treated carcasses of other dead ruminants such as sheep. There had been a change in the standard of the treatment of this gruesome protein supplement, and the guess was that sheep scrapie had somehow made the jump to cows.

But if a disease jumped from one species to another, campaigners argued, then surely it could leap to humans.

Over the next few years, the disease progressed by leaps and bounds. It leaped into thousands of head of cattle, and it bounded into zoo and farm and parkland creatures such as elk, mice, marmosets, pigs, antelopes, kudu, oryx, eland, cheetah, puma, ocelot, domestic cat and even ostrich.

Many of these were given feed which might have been from infected carcasses. As a variant of BSE appeared in more species, it became increasingly difficult for minis-

ters and scientists to say that there was negligible risk to humans.

The Department of Health's CJD surveillance unit in Edinburgh has been watching the pattern of incidence of the disease to see if there was a clear link with BSE. The pattern until now has been puzzling. Robert Will, of Edinburgh, pointed out that although there seemed to be a high proportion of farm workers who died of CJD in recent years, the proportion of ministers of religion was even higher.

There had been, until very recently, no abattoir workers with the disease, although these would have been most at risk. And even more confusingly, the one-in-a-million incidence of CJD seemed to be the same everywhere scientists looked: in Europe, where there was no BSE but where people ate beef, and in India, where cows are sacred and many are vegetarians.

Even now, scientists do not understand how the disease is transmitted. The favoured candidate has been an infectious protein called a prion which converts normal protein molecules into dangerous ones by inducing them to change shape. But not every body is confident about prions: it is still possible that an as-yet-to-be-detected virus is involved.

There was also the problem about the rate of the growth of the disease. In 1984 there had been more than 50 cases. By November 1985, there had been only 39.

But by November 1995, things had started to change. Researchers reported in the British Medical Journal on the same day that there had been 100 cases, including two teenagers, and four dairy farmers. One of the researchers, Sheila Gore of the Medical Research Council's biostatistics unit at Cambridge, concluded the connection was "more than happenstance."

Steve Dealler, a microbiologist at Burnley general hospital and secretary of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Research Campaign has been pointing out since 1993 that for every cow destroyed because of BSE, there may be hundreds slaughtered and sold to butchers before the symptoms have developed. On his reckoning, by the year 2000 the British could have eaten 1.8 million infected beasts.

Yesterday the Government shifted its position. Dr Dealler was not satisfied. The evidence had been available much earlier, he said.

"The epidemiology was done by Sheila Gore and printed last year in the British Medical Journal: that showed the number of cases in farmers had increased, as had the number of cases in teenagers: these cases were so unlikely it could not have happened by chance."

John Bourne, director of the Institute for Animal Health at Compton in Berkshire, said last night: "There was an open window for infection to pass to man in the period 1985 to 1989. That window was then closed. There may have been odd chinks in that window, but that has now been rectified."

Where's the beef?

As well as beef being used in the manufacture of pies, sausages and burgers, beef products (including gelatine and suet, which can still be made from cattle vertebrae) are found in unexpected foods some of which are listed below. There is no suggestion that these products contain BSE-infected material.

Foods which contain beef, mechanically recovered meat, or suet

- Chicken gravy granules
- Stuffing mixes
- Frankfurters
- Christmas pudding
- Salami

Foods which usually contain unspecified gelatine or animal fats which could come from beef

- Baby food - eg chicken casserole, mixed vegetables, spaghetti and sausage
- Cakes
- Biscuits - eg digestive, ginger nuts
- Sweets - eg fruit pastilles, wine gums, liquorice allsorts
- Tinned and frozen puddings
- Chilled desserts - eg fudge fruits
- Jellies
- Supplements - eg vitamin capsules, cod liver oil

Source: Food Commission

History of BSE

March 1993
Dairy farmer Peter Warhurst dies from CJD

July 1993
Dairy farmer Mark Duncan Templeman dies from CJD

May 1995
Stephen Churchill, aged 19, dies from CJD

September 1995
Strained farmer revealed to have died from CJD

November 1995
Michael Bowen, 29, dies six weeks after giving birth: CJD suspected

February 1996
Abolish worker Leonard Ernest dies from CJD, aged 20, die from CJD

March 1996
Government announces strain of CJD is linked to BSE

June 1988
Southwood Committee makes immediate recommendations: infected animals be destroyed, milk from infected animals be disposed of; further research be commissioned

August 1988
Government orders slaughter of all BSE-infected animals

February 1989
Southwood Report published. "It is most unlikely that BSE will have any implications for human health," it says



GRAPHIC: STEVE VILLERS, GRAPHIC NEWS

Beef sales, tonnes

Nov 1995	81,500
Dec 1995	65,200
Jan 1996	69,658
Feb 1996	72,767

Source: Meat & Livestock Commission



John Gummer (top) and his daughter demonstrating the safety of beef. Jessa Wake (above left), and Michelle Bowen, possible victims of the newly discovered strain of CJD



Question of taste

'It is quite clear to me our beef is safe. My own family eats beef and I have no worry about that. There is no evidence anywhere in the world of BSE passing from animals to humans'
— John Gummer
Agriculture Minister
January 1990

'There is currently no scientific evidence that BSE can be transmitted to humans or that eating beef causes CJD in humans. That issue is not in question'
— John Major
December 1995

'BSE is not transmissible to humans and that in any event our controls are effective enough to prevent the infective agent getting into the human food chain'
— Douglas Hogg
Agriculture Minister
December 1995

Upbeat mood gives way to forebodings for farmers

Industry

Owen Bowcott

UNTIL 3.30pm yesterday, the beef cattle industry was in buoyant mood, confident it could persuade the public to return to lean steaks and minced meat.

Consumption of beef per head of population has fallen by more than 15 per cent in 10 years, but farmers insisted this was due to higher prices and the decline of the Sunday family roast.

The mood was upbeat among the thousands of exhibitors and visitors at the Beef '96 fair, held last week at the National Agricultural Centre's showground, in Stoneleigh, Warwickshire.

"The message presented from the deputy chief veterinary officer who was extremely optimistic about BSE," said Richard Sibley, secretary of the British Cattle Veterinary Association.

"People were feeling buoyant and concentrating on the prospects of producing quality meat for the supermarket shelves. The disease is going from herds. From an animal health point of view it's been a successful campaign. The outbreak is under control."

By contrast, reaction to the Commons statement yesterday mingled resentment at another round of "scare stories" with deeper forebodings.

"The measures announced by the Government and the public's reaction to them will have serious implications for all cattle farmers," warned Sir David Nash, the president of the National Farmers' Union (NFU).

"Consumer confidence in the quality of the meat people eat is paramount. The NFU has been calling for the Government to publish all the advice it has received from its experts. This is the only way public confidence in beef can be maintained."

Though the incidence of BSE infected cattle has slipped from a peak of 1,300 cases a week in 1991 to around 300 a week, the revelation that there appears to be a new, human form of the disease threatens to suppress beef consumption further.

"It's not very positive for us," said a spokesman for ABP, a company which owns slaughterhouses in York, Scotland and Shrewsbury. "We are concerned about the implications. There was a problem with sales in December [coinciding with the last crop of BSE stories], but there has been a good recovery since."

Most producers were keeping their heads down. The Federation of Fresh Meat Wholesalers, which represents most slaughterhouses, and Midland Meat Packers, another large player in the industry, stayed silent.

The Meat and Livestock Commission last night said it could not calculate the losses suffered through BSE. Total beef sales to the consumer in 1994 amounted to £1.86 billion. In November and December last year, they fell by 17 per cent. They have recovered since by around 5 per cent.

A commission spokesman

land and Shrewsbury.

yesterday attempted to defuse the impact of the announcement. "We welcome the news that there remains no scientific proof that BSE can be transmitted by beef to man."

"The latest research shows there's a possibility that a number of CJD cases might be associated with access to BSE agents but they are all before the removal of offal from the food chain ordered in 1988. It does not suggest the BSE agent can be found in muscle."

Richard Wood, the managing director of Ashford Cattle Market, was less guarded. "The whole thing has been blown up out of proportion. How many people have died of smoking since 1988, for example? You is not that many deaths. But we are all fed up with the way it's been

handled. If there is a problem, it's been forced on others outside our influence."

In Germany, the health ministry said it would consider the developments. Bonn is embroiled in a row with the European Commission after five regions banned British beef. They have been accused of breaching the principle of a free market.

One Kent farmer, Brian Frith, whose cattle have never had a case of BSE, said the Government should have taken early claims of risks to humans more seriously.

"If the Government had said they didn't know if there were any risks to humans and had set up a proper programme of slaughtering infected herds and issuing lists of safe farms, there wouldn't have been such a problem."

Public 'left confused'

Sarah Bosseley

THE Consumers' Association accused the Government yesterday of failing to calm public anxieties about BSE and beef, as the supermarkets and burger chains did their best to play down the significance of the government statement.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) had given "blanket reassurances that beef is safe to eat, but consumers remain to be convinced," said Laura Simons, the association's senior public affairs officer.

This assurance had now been challenged. "Consumers want and need to know if they should eat beef. We need more information to cut through current confusion."

The association called for more and better labelling of meat products and for the results of research on BSE to be publicly available.

Up to 10,000 schools have taken beef off the menu, or offer alternatives, according to the Local Authority Caterers' Association (LACA), which last December advised its members, in response to parents' concern, to substitute pork and poultry dishes for beefburgers and beef sausages in school canteens.

Its spokesman, Arnold Fowell, said it expected a strong reaction to yesterday's announcement in those schools still serving beef.

"The level of concern had fallen," said Mr Fowell. "We couldn't believe what we were hearing this morning."

The burger chains and supermarkets rested their case on the quality of their beef. "All meat sold by Sainsbury's is sourced from approved suppliers, who are visited regularly by qualified food technologists to ensure that our controls and standards are properly and rigorously enforced," said Geoff Sprigell, the chain's director of scientific services.

McDonald's said it used only "prime cuts of boneless beef - lean flank and fore-quarter - in which BSE has never been detected."

The Beefmaster chain of 285 restaurants said they used steaks only from Argentina and Australia, "which have never had a case of BSE."

Gloom over cattle country

Erlend Clouston

IN the kitchen at Glogburn farm, the faces grew in length with the Health Secretary's speech. "I didn't expect anything else," snorted 64-year-old John Niven as Mr Dorrell explained to Radio 5 listeners why it was, well, just about totally safe to eat meat. "You get to the stage where you're fed up with it," groaned his son Ian.

Across the yard at the Perthshire farm, 27 tawny bullocks munched their hay, oblivious to the fact that their value to the Niven household had probably just plummeted. Last November's BSE scare

Producers

knocked 26p a kilo off the deadweight price of Glogburn beef, which multiplies up to £100 per steer. Unless the public shows unwonted resilience to lurid headlines, the same is likely to happen again, which, when you're selling 250 cattle a year, has a devastating effect on income.

"If they can't give a definite answer they should shut up," grumbled John, whose father first took the lease of 450-acre Glogburn in 1924.

Adding to the Niven's sense of injustice is the fact Scotland, for whom the beef trade is worth £500 million annually, appeared to be conquering BSE. In the first quarter of 1995 there were 394 reported cases; this year it is down to 41. "I don't know of anyone around here who's had it," protested John.

So how many drivers were killed on the roads each year?

"If you're not going to catch anything you'll have to live in a glass bowl." Ian sniffed as four-year-old daughter Annabel, one of seven mouths dependent on decent beef prices, crammed a homemade cheese biscuit to her face.

Down the road at the 140-year-old Perth auction mart, the world's biggest weekly processor of pedigree beef, the same philosophy applied. Its restaurant menu defiantly offered a £4.95 chef's special of steak pie. "Och, it does cross your mind, but look at salmonella and eggs," shrugged cook Joan Young. "We do offer a choice of fish and vegetarian, but the majority go for meat. Everybody's days are numbered, anyway."

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UP TO COMP INS FOR YOUR COVER

WHITEHALL PURGE: Ombudsman warns of more workload mistakes amid benefit staff slimdown, Treasury losses and HSE alarm

Cuts to cost 21,000 social security jobs

David Brindle, Social Services Correspondent

MORE than 21,000 jobs will be axed under the Government's drive to cut social security running costs by a quarter over the next three years, it emerged yesterday.

Official plans show the staffing complement of the Department of Social Security and its agencies will fall from 100,000 to fewer than 79,000 by 1998/99. The figures reflect an unprecedented jobs purge across Whitehall. Earlier this week, it was disclosed that 12,000 posts in Treasury departments are to go over the next three years, including more than 2,500 in Customs and Excise and 6,700 in the Inland Revenue.

Barry Ramsbottom, general secretary of the Civil and Public Services Association, a civil service union, said: "The Government doesn't seem to realise there could be more votes lost in savaging the Civil Service than there are to be gained."

The DSS annual report shows that gross spending on running costs is planned to fall by 10 per cent between 1995/96 and 1998/99, after rising next year to £3.5 billion.

A department spokeswoman said the figure in the last year, £3.1 billion, would be 25 per cent below what it would otherwise be if costs were allowed to rise in line with expected workload.

Staff numbers, including casuals and posts represented by overtime, are planned to

fall from 100,152 in 1995/96 to 78,589 in 1998/99. Almost 17,000 jobs, the bulk of the reduction, will be lost among permanent staff.

The report says the cuts will be achieved by simplifying procedures, maximising use of computer systems and introducing a "purchaser/provider" system of payment by results that will "involve both DSS staff and the private sector".

Jim Boyd, president of the DSS group of the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union, said: "Ministers and officials have been trying to convince us there might not be large-scale job losses, but here is the proof."

Although ministers have said the cuts will not affect services to claimants, one of the first casualties looks like being the Benefits Agency's free telephone inquiry service in English, Chinese, Punjabi

and Urdu. The agency says it is examining alternatives to the existing 0800 numbers, including a local-rate service. Any change will not affect the free inquiry line for disabled people and that which helps people complete claim forms.

William Reid, the parliamentary ombudsman, today restates his warning that civil service staff cuts will lead to worse service to the public and more mistakes.

Mr Reid first spoke out last week in a report on the Child Support Agency. His annual report today shows a 28 per cent rise in complaints referred to him by MPs last year.

He said: "There is a risk that fewer staff will lead to both slower services to the public and to more mistakes... I doubt whether automation and technology will compensate fully for cuts in human resources."

A failure to account for a rising tide of fraud among the unemployed led the National Audit Office today to refuse to approve the accounts of the National Insurance Fund.

Sir John Bourn, the Comptroller and Auditor General, says that some £28 million claimed by the unemployed has been declared to be fraudulent. He is unable to find out how much paid out in benefit to the long term unemployed through other social security benefits is genuine.

Social Security Department Report; HMSO; £16. Annual Report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration; HMSO; £11.85

William Reid... reported 28pc rise in complaints



Staff at Croydon social security office... spending on DSS running costs is set for 10 pc fall by 1998-99

PHOTOGRAPH: SEAN SMITH

Labour accused of shroud waving as union backs health and safety fears

LABOUR'S employment spokesman, Ian McCartney, was accused by the Government yesterday of shroud waving after he claimed that cuts in the Health and Safety Commission's budget, revealed in a leaked letter from the commission's chairman begging for extra cash, showed that the safety of youngsters in training schemes was under threat, writes Patrick Wintour.

Mr McCartney was attacked in the Commons by James Faive, training minister, who insisted that government training schemes were properly monitored by the Health and Safety Executive. He refused to respond to Mr McCartney's claim that the letter showed the proposed cuts would lead to death and injury in the workplace. The letter, due to be sent by the commission chairman, Frank Davies, to the Environment Secretary, John Gummer, said that because of funding cuts "we cannot meet all the expectations and requirements that the Government, Parliament and the courts are placing on us."

As an official inquiry was mounted into the source of the leak, a civil service union, the Institute of Professional and Managerial Staffs, said the letter confirmed what the union had been saying for two years - that vital parts of the HSE were close to collapse because of staff and funding cuts and increased workload.

Phil Carpenter, IPMS chief negotiator, said Mr Davies had emphatically denied the IPMS allegations when the HSE's annual report was issued in November. He added: "The truth is out now. While the HSE is carrying through major initiatives on

such issues as occupational health, the staff who have the necessary expertise to deal with the matter have been reduced... almost to extinction... The Liberal Democrat spokesman, Nick Harvey, said: "Normally Opposition MPs are the first to complain of spending cuts, but when a government agency makes this plea it shows the system is in crisis."

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PC WORLD

Pro-Europe MPs warn against veto 'defeatism'

Michael White, Political Editor

AN ALL-party campaign of pro-European MPs last night urged John Major to use the forthcoming Maastricht review conference as a chance to tilt the balance of advantage within the European Union towards reforms Britain wants to see.

With Tory Euro-sceptics maintaining a heavy barrage of fire ahead of tonight's Commons debate on the Cabinet's white paper, which represents the position for the inter-governmental conference (IGC) beginning on March 29 - the European Movement warned against taking "an inflexible stance" on the key question of qualified majority voting, so-called QMV.

Ministers are playing down tonight's vote by imposing only a one-line whip. A statement on elections in Northern Ireland also seems timed to downgrade its importance. In the meantime, MPs argued that ministers were "wrong in principle" to oppose an extension of QMV into new policy areas, because such changes were needed to ensure tougher

action against fraud, curb excess spending on regional policies and direct research funds towards British projects, notably in hi-tech areas like defence and medicine.

It had already proved vital in making the internal market work better, they said. "Britain's defeatist mentality on the veto is unwarranted... in fact Britain is very rarely outvoted in the Council of Ministers" - less so than Germany, which supports extended QMV.



Bill Cash... 'last chance to reverse federal push'

Such talk infuriates Eurosceptics, who fear the federalist rhetoric John Redwood said this week that enlargement of the EU to the east would not be worth it if the price was more QMV - a reversal of the Thatcherite theory that a wider EU would be less federal.

Yesterday the Tories' Bill Cash called the IGC "our last chance" to reverse the Maastricht Treaty's push towards a federal Europe, while Labour's Peter Shore is warning colleagues that the goal of full employment must be added to the Maastricht criteria for launching a single currency.

Like many Tory sceptics, Mr Shore wants a referendum on a single currency, though this week leaders of the 100-strong 92 Group of Tory MPs told John Major that a manifesto commitment to that effect would satisfy them.

Many MPs are unhappy about Mr Major's likely referendum pledge, and one campaigner, the Labourist Sir Terence Higgins, has warned ministers that if they lose a referendum campaign they cannot simply accept the voters' verdict. "They would have to resign," he said.

Home Office relieved of divorce bill role

David Henshaw, Westminster Correspondent

JOHAN Major has instructed the Cabinet Office to take over full responsibility for the no-fault divorce bill after the rough ride suffered by the Lord Chancellor, Lord Mackay, in the House of Lords.

Roger Freeman, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and married for 27 years, has been chosen to lead Monday's second reading debate on the Family Law Bill.

Downing Street faces the certainty of a big Conservative rebellion led by John Patten, a former Cabinet minister, against making divorce easier.

The Prime Minister is hoping to avoid a further damaging split in the party by ensuring a free vote on whether couples should have to wait 12 months, 18 months or two years before getting a divorce.

Mr Freeman, despite having one of the lowest profiles in the Cabinet, has insisted that a free vote must be a key part of the package to avoid personal humiliation over the handling of the issue.

Ministers had intended that the Home Office should handle Lord Mackay's bill in the Commons and had put a junior minister, Jonathan Evans, a practising Catholic, in place to steer it through. He will now play only a minor role in summing up for the Government in the debate.

The Cabinet Office will also have a strict role in monitoring the detail of the legislation through Sir Robin Butler, the Cabinet Secretary.

The bill is the Cabinet sub-committee monitoring the bill to take swift decisions on other controversial amendments, including the unresolved problem of how to handle the issue of pension splitting at the time of divorce.

The Lords defeated the Government by insisting that pensions be split, but ministers think this may be unworkable in law.

Officials reject Scott blame

Richard Norton-Taylor

SENIOR Whitehall officials last night warned ministers against making them carry the can for the sweeping criticisms of the Government machine in the Scott report on the arms-to-Iraq scandal.

Liz Symons, general secretary of the First Division Association, which represents top civil servants, told MPs it would be "very unfair" if officials had to take the blame for Sir Richard Scott's criticisms while ministers avoided responsibility for misleading Parliament. It remains unclear whether

civil servants and Whitehall lawyers will be disciplined.

Ms Symons told the Commons public service committee, which is investigating the report's constitutional implications, that the practice of giving "incomplete answers" to MPs had led to tensions within the Civil Service.

In written evidence, the FDA attacked the distinction ministers are now making in accepting national "accountability" to Parliament while distancing themselves from "responsibility" for the activities of their departments.

The FDA also attacked ministers, notably Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, for distinguishing between policy

- for which they took responsibility - and the operations of their departments.

No such distinction was made in Questions of Procedure for Ministers - their code of conduct - and if the distinction was upheld it might ensure "that ministers were never identified as being responsible for any failure".

If ministers were no longer responsible for the conduct of their departments, "who is accountable to Parliament for the actions of the civil servants?" the FDA asked.

It opened up the prospect of civil servants becoming responsible to Parliament by giving evidence on their own behalf to Commons committees.

Police called in after planning councillors told to quit

Martin Wainwright

POLICE are to investigate four years of decisions by a district council whose entire planning committee has been told to resign in the face of evidence of "manipulation" involving a developer.

An independent report commissioned by Labour-controlled Bassetlaw in Nottinghamshire castigates an "extraordinary" system which saw the Labour planning chairman and his Conservative counterpart "run the planning machine" in defiance of officials' advice. The committee, which represents Graham Crossland, and his deputy, Don Grundy, were sacked by Labour yesterday

after refusing to resign, and the party's six other committee members will step down.

The inquiry was ordered after public unease about 12 planning applications in four years, including decisions in favour of new housing and a supermarket. All involved a Nottinghamshire developer who has not been named, and an estimated £6 million increase in land values on the sites approved.

The inquiry chairman, Richard Phelps, a retired town development manager and planning in-

spector, concludes planning permissions were given "against the strongest advice of staff on planning and technical grounds."

He says: "Any reasonable outside observer must conclude that the committee has been manipulated in some way."

The report says that Mr Crossland's performance "fell below that which the public is entitled to expect from elected members who are chairs of committees." It adds that blame must be shared with the Opposition group leader, Bernard Simcox.

The report calls for the resignation of the entire committee, and the revocation of the tainted planning permissions.

TODAY IN PARLIAMENT

House of Commons: Northern Ireland questions. Prime Minister's questions. Debate on European intergovernmental conference. Backbench debate on lottery beneficiaries in west Suffolk, opened by Richard Spring (C).

House of Lords: Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill, second reading. Deer (Amendment)(Scotland) Bill, report. Criminal Legal Aid (Scotland) (Prescribed Proceedings) Amendment Regulations.

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ADMIRAL

Yeltsin back in two-man race

James Meek in Moscow sees a fitter president shaping up to challenge his Communist rival

THE struggle for the presidency of Russia is shaping up as a straight fight between two widely mistrusted men as a revitalised Boris Yeltsin makes up ground lost to his Communist rival, Gennady Zyuganov.

A poll published yesterday echoed the results of other surveys this week, showing Mr Yeltsin has moved up to second place behind the Communist leader as a string of marginal candidates fall by the wayside.

This is an extraordinary political spring for the Russian president after a long bleak winter lying seventh or eighth in the ratings. It follows months of war in Chechnya and chronic delays in paying wages, and comes de-

spite his heart attacks, his long absences from the Kremlin, and his often loutish behaviour on the public stage.

"It will be Yeltsin versus Zyuganov," said Boris Grushin, head of the polling organisation Vox Populi. "No one else is capable of reaching the second round."

Russia's election rules say that if no candidate gets more than 50 per cent of the vote in the first round, due on June 16, the two best-placed, go through to a second round, probably on July 14.

The shuffling, bloated, dazed figure that Mr Yeltsin cut after his second heart attack in October seemed incapable of running for president, let alone winning, and even a month ago Mr Zyuganov looked quite likely to

face the ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy or the liberal Grigory Yavlinsky in the run-off.

Mr Yeltsin remains unpopular, but looks like the only real challenger to the Communists. "The election campaign is shaping up to be a bipolar contest," said Dr Kyryll Kholodkovskiy. "That doesn't mean all the voters will divide themselves into two camps of Yeltsinites and Zyuganov supporters. All the same I think the process of concentrating the votes around these two candidates will continue."

The latest poll showed Mr Zyuganov the clear leader on 19.1 per cent, with Mr Yeltsin on 14 per cent. Tellingly, almost 30 per cent of voters were undecided. A string of candidates capable of shaving slivers of the leaders' vote have dropped out. Soviet revivalists Alexander Rutskoi and Victor Anpilov have thrown in their lot with Mr Zyuganov, while economic rightwingers like Victor Chernomyrdin, Yegor Gaidar and Boris Fyodorov are virtually certain to back Mr Yeltsin.

There are two rivals yet to be marginalised. Mr Zhirinovskiy — lying fourth but always underestimated by pollsters — and Mr Yavlinsky, who has vowed he will never support either Mr Yeltsin or Mr Zyuganov and will not pull out of the race.

Moscow pundits are increasingly speculating about a surreal partnership between the intellectual Mr Yavlinsky and the authoritarian General Alexander Lebed to provide an alternative "third force".

Christopher promises bigger Nato

Martin Walker in Washington and David Fairhead

NATO enlargement is on track and it will happen, the US secretary of state, Warren Christopher, declared yesterday — but no decisions will be made until December, after the Russian and US presidential elections.

Responding to the wave of alarm which swept Russia's neighbours after a parliamentary vote in Moscow last week sought to rescind the dissolution of the old Soviet Union, Mr Christopher told the foreign ministers of 12 central and eastern European countries meeting in Prague. "We are determined to move forward."

Nato, he said, "has made a commitment to take in new members and it must not and will not keep new democracies in the waiting room forever. And he vowed: "New allies will be full members of Nato."

'So you have understood after all that Nato must not expand'

But the Clinton administration is treading carefully, fearful of the domestic impact of a defeat for Boris Yeltsin in Russia's election in June, and of the unravelling of US diplomacy around the world if Russia changes its broadly cooperative attitude towards the US.

The US is hoping that Mr Yeltsin will urge caution over Taiwan when he visits Beijing next month. America is also counting on Russian support to secure a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty later this year, and depends strongly on Russian backing for its peace programme in Bosnia.

President Clinton has put considerable effort into supporting the Yeltsin government in the run-up to the Russian election, pressing the International Monetary Fund to release another \$2 billion in credits for Russia. Mr Clinton will be in Moscow for a summit next month, and plans a further meeting with the Russian leader at the G7 summit in France.

The White House has denied that the Russians were secretly promised a long delay in any expansion of Nato, in return for co-operation in



So you have understood after all that Nato must not expand

World new in brief

Britain pledges £17m for Bosnia

BRITAIN pledged £17 million for rehabilitation work in Bosnia yesterday to bolster the flagging peace and encourage other donors to make good their promises to finance the Dayton agreement.

"We must show that peace pays," the Overseas Aid Minister, Baroness Chalker, said, announcing the initiative in London.

The signs of mobility will do most to persuade the parties that the rewards of peace are real.

The high-profile move comes as diplomats admit that the civilian reconstruction effort has not matched the success of the Nato-led peace implementation force (I-FOR).

British sources say the United States, initially reluctant to pay for even administrative costs, now realises its tight December deadline for military withdrawal can be met only if the civilian effort makes progress.

Of the total, £3 million is to be spent on "free and fair" elections. But the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) estimates their cost at £100 million. — *Jan Black, Diplomatic Editor.*

Papandreou 'recovers'

TO THE astonishment of Greeks, doctors say Andreas Papandreou, the former prime minister, is to be released from hospital today.

"Start of developing a fever or a new lung infection, he will be out," said one of a team of 25 physicians who have been treating Mr Papandreou, aged 77, at the Onassis heart centre in Athens since November. He was in critical condition and on life support for several weeks, after suffering kidney and lung failure.

On being admitted into intensive care, Mr Papandreou was given a 3 per cent chance of survival. — *Helena Smith, Athens.*

Aids film imitates life

AFTER years of legal wrangling, the makers of the Oscar-winning film Philadelphia have conceded that the movie, starring Tom Hanks, was "inspired in part" by the story of a New York lawyer who was sacked because he suffered from AIDS.

Tristar Pictures said it reached a settlement on Tuesday with the family of Geoffrey Bowers, the attorney who died in 1987. It is understood the family will receive a sizeable share of the film's estimated \$40 million profit.

The case has sent nervous tremors through Hollywood because of its potential implications for films loosely based on or inspired by real life stories. — *Jon Katz, New York.*

Santer appeals on jobs

THE president of the European Commission, Jacques Santer, appealed to European Union leaders yesterday to override their finance ministers and back his plan to stimulate growth and jobs by using an EU windfall to spend more on transport and energy networks across the continent.

Mr Santer will tell the EU summit in Turin next week that there will be at least £3 billion of unspent agricultural money in the Brussels budget, allowing national governments substantial rebates, while still leaving funds for his infrastructure plan.

But senior EU officials say the likely savings due to agricultural reform could be "substantially greater" than £3 billion.

Meanwhile, the debate about a single European currency took a new turn yesterday when the internal market commissioner, Mario Monti, said governments should scrap the national veto on tax policy. The EU should use majority voting, he said, to create jobs by shifting taxes on workers to a common minimum tax on capital. — *John Fisher and Julie Wolf, Brussels.*

Pavarotti separates from wife

THE opera superstar Luciano Pavarotti and his wife Adua announced their separation yesterday after 35 years of marriage, just weeks after the tenor admitted to an affair with his 25-year-old secretary.

The brief statement, issued through Mrs Pavarotti's lawyer, said they chose to publicise the separation because of the "social obligations that arise from their celebrity status". He said they had not yet begun formal divorce proceedings. — *Reuter, Rome.*

Biker gang buries murdered leader and vows revenge



FATHER-CLAD motorcycle fanatics flocked around the world on the way to yesterday's funeral in the sleepy Danish town of Stenlose to the funeral of the local leader of the Bandidos motorcycle gang, Uffe Larsen, gunned down

10 days ago by their rivals, the Hell's Angels.

About 150 gang members from Europe, the United States and Australia packed into the 16th century Lutheran church where his body lay in a coffin draped in the gang's orange and yellow colours.

Armed police flooded the town, but there was no trouble.

Among the mourners were men in bandages and one on crutches, survivors of the March 10 shooting at Copenhagen airport. One wore a bullet-proof vest.

Banditos said that the motive for the attack was their rivals' desire to stay the top Scandinavian motorcycle gang.

One bearded Bandido said: "We'll show them, they'll pay." — *Reuter.*

German test for single currency

A state poll at the weekend will show whether voters buy Kohl's vision, writes Ian Traynor in Bonn

THE well-to-do citizens of the south German state of Baden-Württemberg may not know it, but when they vote at the weekend to decide who will govern them for the next four years, they may also decide whether they will still have German marks in their pockets by the time of the next ballot.

For the first time in Germany an election is being fought on the issue of the single European currency, and the outcome of Sunday's regional ballot could reverberate well beyond Stuttgart, the state capital, and even beyond Germany.

The Social Democratic Party, in opposition in Bonn but in coalition government in the state with Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrats, is opposing economic and monetary union (EMU), portraying itself as the guardian of jobs at a time of soaring unemployment and deep anxiety about the future of Germany's generous welfare state.

SPD posters plastered all over Baden-Württemberg are calling for a delay in the 1999 scheduled launch of the single currency to concentrate on creating jobs.

The anti-EMU campaign is headed by Dieter Spoerl, the local Social Democratic leader and economics minister in the outgoing coalition, but bears the hallmark of the new SPD national leader, Oskar Lafontaine. Mr Lafontaine has broken with the Bonn consensus on the merits of a common currency since seizing the party leadership last November.

He told a campaign rally at the weekend that a single currency in 1999 could bring recession and greater mass unemployment throughout Europe. Fundists see Mr Lafontaine's campaign as a trial balloon for a bigger national onslaught on EMU, which is central to Mr Kohl's policies.

Should the SPD gain considerably on Sunday, Mr Lafontaine may conclude that he has hit on a dream theme for the next national elections in 1998, only months before

the single currency is due to be launched.

But there is more than EMU at stake on Sunday. Simultaneously, the northern and western states of Schleswig-Holstein and Rhineland-Palatinate elect new state legislatures. The triple poll is being seen as a mid-term test of Mr Kohl's coalition and could determine the future of his small, struggling coalition partner, the Free Democrats.

Nothing much is expected to change in Schleswig-Holstein or Rhineland-Palatinate, both governed by the Social Democrats. But the Free Democrats are fighting for their political survival and will be struggling to muster the 5 per cent of votes the party needs to enter parliament if it is knocked out of two of the three state parliaments, its participation in national government would be questioned.

In Stuttgart, the 'grand coalition' appears to be on its last legs

Already Bonn is buzzing with speculation that a "grand coalition" of Christian and Social Democrats may be the only way to forge the active consensus thought necessary to lead the country out of its worsening economic crisis. But in Stuttgart the "grand coalition" appears to be on its last legs. Both parties say they do not want to continue the co-operation of the past four years.

The Christian Democrats are certain to emerge as the stronger party, but neither of the big parties will be able to rule alone. The Free Democrats are the obvious partner for the Christian Democrats, but if they fail to muster the 5 per cent of the door could open to a Social Democratic coalition with the Greens.

This, in turn, would strengthen the opposition majority in parliament's upper house in Bonn, though the Social Democrats would probably be still slightly short of the two-thirds majority in the upper house which would enable them to paralyse Mr Kohl's government by vetoing his legislation.

Berlusconi's party manager accused of bribing judges

John Hooper in Rome

THE leader of the Italian Right, Silvio Berlusconi, embarked on a general election campaign yesterday, weighed down by fresh accusations that the man who runs his party systematically bribed Roman judges.

One of Mr Berlusconi's MPs said that Cesare Previti, chief organiser of the billionaire's Forza Italia (Come On, Italy) movement, had been "in a position to fix the rulings of the court of cassation" (Italy's highest court). Michele Cavale, who was dropped as a candidate at next month's election, made his accusations in an interview with a leftwing radio station.

Further claims were made in a statement to prosecutors leaked to the Rome daily newspaper La Repubblica. A society aristocrat whose evidence has already put one senior judge behind bars was quoted as naming seven others she said had received gifts and money from Mr Previti.

Countess Stefania Ariosto said Mr Previti, who is also Mr Berlusconi's lawyer in Rome, used to keep a special account for bribing judges. Her claims were denied yesterday by Mr Previti and the judges named.

Judge Renato Squillante, who was taken into custody last week on the strength of Ms Ariosto's deposition, was reported to have begun a hunger strike to secure his release.

The countess was reported to have claimed that many of the bribes came in the form of jewellery for judges' wives.

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I accuse... A woman supporter of the Nation of Islam is led from a congressional hearing on Louis Farrakhan's tour

PHOTOGRAPH DENNIS COOK

US condemns Farrakhan 'terror tour'

Jonathan Freedland
 in Washington

THE United States Congress is about to crack down on Louis Farrakhan, the head of the Nation of Islam, whose organisation of the Million Man March last year made him the *de facto* leader of black America. A coalition of Republicans and Democrats will vote next week to condemn Mr Farrakhan for a world tour last month which included stops in Iran, Iraq and Libya and meetings with Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi.

After a bitter hearing on Capitol Hill, which descended into a brawl on Tuesday between Nation of Islam activists and congressional staff, Mr Farrakhan also faces legal action by the government. The Clinton administration is considering prosecuting the cleric — widely condemned as a black supremacist and anti-Semite — for making unauthorised visits to countries classified by the US as sponsors of international terrorism. The state department said he was guilty of "cavorting" with the dictators of countries with which the US has severed relations. If prosecuted, he would face a heavy

fine or travel restrictions. "The message today is enforce the law," said Christopher Smith, the Republican chairman of the House international relations subcommittee which held hearings on Mr Farrakhan's "terror tour". Struggling to be heard above the heckling of several hundred Nation of Islam supporters, the Republican Peter King called Mr Farrakhan a "vicious racist and hate-monger, as well as a national security threat". The ire of Congress was stirred most by Mr Farrakhan's acceptance of a pledge from Libya for \$1 billion (\$550 million) in aid, and his

reported comment to an Iranian news agency: "God will not give Japan or Europe the honour of bringing down the United States; this is an honour God will bestow upon Muslims." Congress now seems ready to tighten the squeeze on the Nation of Islam. Even before the trip, the authorities had moved to cancel federal contracts hiring the Nation's security unit — the so-called Fruit of Islam — to protect mainly black inner-city housing estates. As the hearing began, activists chanting "Hands off Farrakhan" stormed the platform to protest that their leader had

not been invited to testify. Mr Farrakhan had said he would have welcomed a "showdown" with the government. If called, he would have exposed Congress as a puppet of the Israeli parliament. Protestors later chased several committee members out of the hearing room, leading to a brawl in the corridors. Two were arrested for disruption of Congress. Meanwhile Jonetta Rose Barras, a leading black activist, accused Mr Farrakhan of squandering both the money and the political capital raised by the Million Man March, which is still \$150,000 in the red.

S Lebanon erupts as suicide attack kills soldier Hizbullah bomber blasts Israeli patrol

Derek Brown in Taibe,
 Israeli-occupied
 south Lebanon

HEAVY fighting erupted in south Lebanon yesterday after an Israeli patrol in the occupation zone was blasted by a roadside bomb. One soldier died and five were wounded. The Islamist guerrilla movement Hizbullah claimed that one of its men had blown himself up in the attack. A source in the United Nations peacekeeping force, Unifil, said early indications were of a suicide bombing. Yesterday's death blast followed a brief lull in south Lebanon's ugly war of attrition, which has claimed many hundreds of lives — including 157 Israeli troops — since the zone was established in June 1985. But it also came at a time of growing tension in the region. Lebanese news bulletins and newspapers have been giving shrill warnings of imminent Israeli action against the Hizbullah and other guerrillas.

Lebanese news bulletins and newspapers have been giving shrill warnings of imminent Israeli action against the Hizbullah and other guerrillas. This month alone there have been 60 attacks on Israeli forces and Israel's client militia, the so-called South Lebanese Army. In February there were 90 attacks, the most ever recorded by Unifil in a single month. Last week four soldiers of the elite Golani Brigade were killed by a roadside bomb, detonated as they chased gunmen. In Israel there has been intense speculation about a retaliatory strike. On Monday night Israeli television reported reinforcements en-

tering the "security zone", possibly in preparation for an operation. An additional cause of tension has been Israel's blockade of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, although some travel restrictions have been eased. Some of the 500 Islamists arrested are suspected of having links with the recent suicide bombings in Israel, which claimed 62 lives. The government has said it will expel some of the men picked up, prompting speculation of another mass deportation to south Lebanon. In 1992 Israel transported more than 400 Islamists into Lebanon and dumped them just north of the occupation zone. The Lebanese government refused to let them move any further, and they remained for a year on a bleak hillside in no man's land.

'Let's get back to basics. Who in this conflict is in the wrong country?'

Now the Lebanese government is saying again that it will not allow its territory to be used as a human refuse heap. Lebanese soldiers have hastily built earth barriers across some roads on their side of the zone. South Lebanon is, at the best of times, a weird and eerie place. On Tuesday, less than 24 hours before the latest bombing, this reporter spent several hours with Unifil touring some of the most bloodied terrain in the region. There is, at first glance, no hint of conflict in the landscape of rocky slopes and terraced fields of olive groves

and almond trees. Yet the signs of war are all around. Whole villages have been obliterated by Israeli explosives, to prevent their use for ambush. Roads are studded with Unifil checkpoints and security gates. The zone's civilian population is about 200,000. In 1985, before the Israelis came, it was more than three times that figure. The depopulation shows in the unworked fields, the somnolent quiet of the villages, and the virtual absence of young men of military age. There are young men, but many of them serve with the SLA, or in the less visible ranks of the Hizbullah or the Amal militia. Not infrequently, members of the same family fight on different sides. In Taibe, 500 yards or so from the site of yesterday's blast, soldiers of the Finnish battalion (Finbatt), which straddles the border of the zone, are overlooked by both Israeli and SLA positions, which means they are often uncomfortably close to the firing line. Which is exactly where they are supposed to be. "My job is to look after the civilian people here, their houses, their olive trees and of course the human beings. That is enough for me. If soldiers kill each other, so what? That is not my problem," said the affable company commander in Taibe, Major Markku Haapasalo. But Maj Haapasalo admitted that his tiny force does from time to time find itself protecting armed as well as unarmed civilians. "We try to get them to move away from the villages when they fire. Yes, they do sometimes fire from the villages. But that is also where they live and work," he said. Another Unifil official breaks in: "Back to basics. Who [in this conflict] is in the wrong country?"

Kenyan plea for aid faces rising donor scepticism

Greg Barrow in Nairobi

THE Kenyan government is expected to plead for increased aid to its growing economy, and to attempt to deflect criticism of continuing political repression, when it meets donor countries in Paris today. The annual meeting brings together senior Kenyan ministers, representatives of multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and bilateral donors, including Britain and Germany. Divisions have emerged between countries such as Britain, which have heavy investments in Kenya and remain strong historical links, and other donors, particularly in Scandinavia, which say pressure to improve human rights must be stepped up. "The political situation is still not what we would call satisfactory," said one Scandinavian diplomat in Nairobi. "We'll be carrying out a major evaluation of our aid budget to Kenya after the next elections." Some donors are likely to highlight the harassment of opposition MPs and the disruption of meetings and rallies. They will also question the lack of judicial independence — evidenced by the imprisonment last year of the dissident Koigi wa Wamwere. Kenya is expected to cite its economic growth rate — more than 5 per cent a year — and its achievement of single-digit inflation. Robert Shaw, a spokesman for the Safina party, led by the white conservationist Richard Leakey, said: "The fact that the government has found itself unable to register new opposition parties like ours shows that fundamentally, nothing much has changed." The government's refusal to register new parties will be raised. Also on the agenda will be President Moi's unbudgeted expenditure on a \$30 million presidential jet.

Winnie loses claim for cash

David Beresford
 in Johannesburg

WINNIE MANDELA failed to put in an appearance at a hearing to decide a financial settlement in her divorce proceedings yesterday, losing by default any legal claim on the estate of the South African president. Nelson Mandela said in a statement later: "I have instructed my legal representative to negotiate an ex-gratia payment to her, and to waive of the costs granted by the court in my favour." He added: "I am glad that the case is over and regret that my ex-wife could not bring herself to negotiate an amicable settlement. It would have saved us both and our children much pain... I hope and trust that she will now be prepared to be reasonable. It can only be to her benefit." Mrs Mandela said she might go to the higher constitutional court to get what she called a "fair hearing". She said she was taking legal advice. The hearing on the financial settlement was separated from the divorce action by Judge Frikkie Eloff on Monday. But when the matter resumed in the Rand supreme court yesterday morning there was no sign of Mrs Mandela, or her lawyers. Counsel for the president, Wim Trenzgo, asked for the dismissal of the claim and costs, which were granted. On Tuesday Judge Eloff granted a decree of divorce to Mr Mandela, on the grounds of the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage and Mrs Mandela's adultery with a young lawyer. Mrs Mandela claimed half of her husband's estate and demanded details of his financial assets. Local newspapers have valued the estate at nearly \$7 million, but they were granted. Papers before the court have shown that he has given large sums of money to Mrs Mandela and their children since his release from prison in 1991. He contributed more than \$100,000 towards the cost of the lavish mansion she had

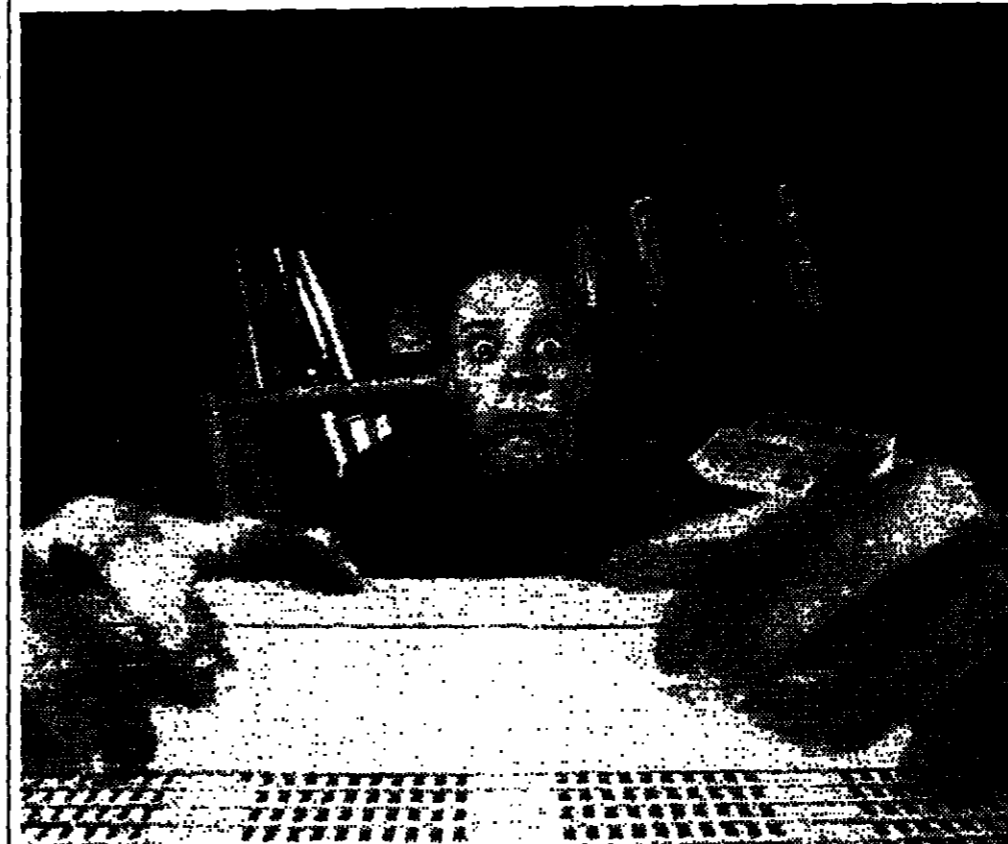
built in Soweto, and \$30,000 for her defence on kidnapping charges in the trial in 1991 linked to the murder of a 14-year-old township activist, Stompie Seipei. Mr Mandela spent £170,000 on houses and cars for their two daughters and the schooling of his grandchildren. The public humiliation of Mrs Mandela in the supreme court raises questions about her political survival. There are few commentators who would predict an end to her role in public life, having seen her raise herself from the ranks of the politically dead on too many occasions in the past. But the disclosure by the hugely popular president of her casual treatment of Mrs Mandela "stunned the platform" — "I was the loneliest man."

Two of her bodyguards were charged yesterday with assault

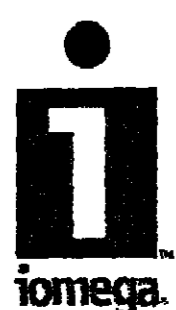
he told Judge Eloff — must rule out any return to office in a Mandela government and could cost her the leadership of the ANC Women's League. Her band of intensely loyal supporters in the ANC will probably be sufficiently numerous to guarantee her a parliamentary seat under the party list system which operates in South Africa. But the divorce is unlikely to end the scandal surrounding her. Mr Mandela said in his testimony that he could disclose "more serious" dirty linen than the single act of adultery cited. Only yesterday her name featured in the criminal courts yet again, when two of her bodyguards were charged with assault and attempted murder before a Soweto magistrate. Mrs Mandela, who has recently started calling herself "Madikizela-Mandela", issued a statement yesterday describing her defeat in the divorce action as a "travesty of justice", adding that it "undermines everything our marriage was all about".



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Countless politicians drone on about how divorce is tearing apart the fabric of society. Tearing apart the fabric of society presumably should be left to professionals like them, not done routinely by households up and down the country.

Suzanne Moore G2 page 7

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Bitter price of short cuts

We are all guilty about beef: farmers most of all

WILL John Selwyn Gummer live to regret stuffing a beefburger into his daughter's mouth? Politically, he presumably already does. It was an asinine way for a minister to demonstrate his faith in the safety of British beef. But how much of a health risk was it? A lot less in 1990 than it would have been in 1989 before the ban on beef offal, used until then in sausages, pies and burgers, was banned. The biggest threat which mad cow poses is not to people who eat beef now — although scientists remain divided — but to people who ate infected beef products before the 1989 controls were introduced. We still do not know whether mad cow disease (bovine spongiform encephalopathy or BSE) can be transmitted to man but a worrying new form of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD), which could be linked with BSE was disclosed by ministers yesterday. New research into 10 people who died from CJD by a committee of specialists advising ministers concluded that "the most likely explanation at present is that these cases are linked to exposure to BSE before the introduction of the specified bovine offal ban in 1989."

No one can criticise the promptness with which ministers moved on the latest research. Two ministers — health and agriculture — made separate statements to the Commons and announced strict new rules: all carcasses from cattle over 30 months to be deboned in specially licensed plants supervised by the Meat Hygiene Service to ensure all trimmings are kept out of the food chain; a ban on the use of all meat and bone meal in feed for farm animals; and a crash £4.5 million research programme into possible links between BSE and its human form, CJD. The reason why this first established link between BSE and CJD is being taken so seriously is because of a potential doomsday scenario. With an incubation

period of up to 30 years, people who ate infected meat in the late 1980s may not show signs of the disease until way into the millennium but the numbers then could be huge: all suffering, like the wobbly mad cows seen on television, from loss of co-ordination, balance, and brain degeneration.

No absolute proof that BSE is passed to humans through beef has been established. The current British CJD rate — one death per million people — is roughly the same as continental countries with no BSE. Austria, which has no BSE, has a higher CJD death rate than Britain. The committee of experts does not want a beef ban. The chief medical officer says it is safe to eat beef, but believes the new evidence is "cause for serious concern".

A new beef scare seems inevitable. That is a pity for the farmers but good news for the food chain. Public scares seem to be the only thing that galvanise ministers in this field. The most probable cause of mad cow disease is suspect cattle food which includes offal from scrapie-infected sheep. Mad sheep disease existed for over 200 years without spreading to cattle until the relatively recent — and utterly deplorable — innovation of feeding sheep scraps to cows. Animal husbandry is expensive: it takes 7lbs of vegetables to make 1lb of beef protein. But the price of short cuts could not have been better illustrated. Cows are herbivores but have been fed chicken litter, pig offal and, until July 1988, infected sheep remains. Yesterday's ban on all meat and bone meal feed for animals comes far too late. The entire food chain philosophy is wrong: the search for a quick fix. Not all fault can be placed on the farmer — producers, processors, distributors, retailers, consumers are all involved — but it starts behind the farm gate. Farming became far too intensive; and nature has hit back.

A moment of truth for India

The election could set the nation's politics on a new course

WHEN INDIA SETS the date of its national election, it ought to be a red letter affair. Not so long ago the news would have been greeted with headlines about the world's largest democracy: there would have been comparisons with China and allusions to India's vital international role. Since the cold war ended the centre of gravity has shifted, leaving the sub-continent in something of a geo-political limbo. India is still, with 500 million voters, the biggest country to operate a formal democratic system: that should be an impressive fact. But confidence in the system has declined over many years — long before the latest corruption scandal. The "hawals" bombshell, in which more than a hundred senior politicians have been accused of accepting illegally laundered money, certainly puts India back on the map. No one can now complain that this will be an election without issues.

It is not the first time that scandals of this type have shaken India. The Bofors gun deal ticked away for three years before the powder caught fire. But this mega-package of corruption has acquired a quite different sort of critical mass. The question for late April and May is whether the sleaze revelations will submerge the credibility of Indian democracy, or impel a new process of cleansing and rejuvenation.

On the credit side is the actual emergence of the affair. The sudden move by the Criminal Bureau of Investigation to "charge-sheet" leading politicians was

first seen as a tactical ploy by Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao to wrong-foot the opposition, and particularly the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). But Mr Rao's own Congress party has been tarnished badly: the real initiative came from the Supreme Court which instructed the CBI to get on with the job. In its everyday work, this body is already far more accessible to the public than the highest judiciary anywhere else including the US. Its 23 judges have become a virtual substitute for correct or inefficient state administrations. The Indian press does not come badly out of the affair either. Though it was slow to respond, a small number of determined journalists refused to let go and there is now a more vigorous investigative effort.

Much will now depend upon whether the leftwing parties — untainted by corruption — and other non-BJP opposition parties can become an effective third force which would then, according to most predictions, hold the balance in a new Lok Sabha. One way or another, this election will be seen as a moment of truth throughout almost all of India. The exception is Kashmir where every such contest will be an irrelevance until the region's own crisis receives radical attention. The Indian economy is already in a state of confused transition and the Prime Minister's "middle way" for it remains undefined. Now India faces a benchmark election which could also set the nation's politics upon a new course.

We are not at all amused

Our royals can't hold a light to Florence Nightingale

MARCH is turning into a bad month for Florence Nightingale. A bad month in a bad century. The eminent Victorian's reputation took a direct hit from Lytton Strachey in 1918 and her stock has been sliding gently downhill ever since. But this month has been particularly damaging. First a Crimean soldier's letter came to light that was anything but complimentary about the Lady with the Lamp. Now a letter of her own reveals that the Lady enjoyed seances with a Swedish masseur and took libido-suppressing bromides well into her 60s.

Some will console themselves that at least this was all very different from the home life of our own dear Queen. And yet who can really say? The history of Victorian England seems littered with the shattered remains of fallen idols with feet of clay. Even Queen Victoria is no longer above suspicion. Then there was Dickens and his love child.

William Morris turns out to have been a bad-tempered hysteric. W G Grace was a cheat. Any number of supposedly respectable people seem to have been plausible candidates for Jack the Ripper. And if even a fraction of the world described by Walter in My Secret Life is true then sexual intercourse began not in 1963 but in prodigious abundance at least a century earlier.

Once upon a time history consisted of rippling yarns about British heroes. Many Conservatives wish it still did. They would like to put Dr Livingstone, Gordon of Khartoum, Florence Nightingale, Margaret Thatcher and the rest back on their pedestals. But history isn't like that. We live in an age when fairy-tale princesses go on television to admit they slept with Guards officers. If Florence Nightingale spent some of her later life doped up to the eyeballs, then that doesn't sully her reputation. It



Letters to the Editor

John Redwood Pulped

FIRST we had the return of the Sex Pistols, complete with pop-bellies and wigs, and now we have none other than John Redwood MP singing the praises of the Lightning Seeds and Blur (There's Always England, March 20).

British pop music has become so safe. Even I and my friends have found ourselves getting all nostalgic about the 1960s lately, even though none of us was born until the mid-1970s. At least in the 60s pop music had a sense of itself, playing separately from, and opposing, to Britain's starchy establishment.

But Redwood's article was not about pop music at all. Instead he was trying to convince British youth that Britain is still a major world player, apparently the success of a few second-rate Britpop bands proves that "there is still a lively cultural heart ticking away in the UK". And not only do we make good pop music but we also win wars!

I was, up until his article, quite ambivalent about the return of the Sex Pistols; but now I can't wait. Andrew Freeman, 4 Robin Hood Avenue, Edwinstowe, Mansfield, Notts NG21 9LG.

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A good man is indeed hard to find. So, who cares?

THE obvious reason why men have not gravitated towards the "caring" professions is because they tend to be badly paid and low status. A good man is hard to find. Society, March 20.

Eugen Hockenjos will, however, find a disproportionate number of men in management in both social services as well as education. Men's declining job prospects may well mean more men will consider working with children in the future. But this presents us with dilemmas which Hockenjos fails to recognise.

We have witnessed countless child sex-abuse scandals in the recent past involving male childcare workers in local authorities as well as the private sector. We know that a significant minority of those men who gravitate towards work with children are abusers. James Hamilton's persistence and obsessive attempts to carry on running his "boys' clubs" are just one example of this phenomenon.

The vast majority of child sex offences, in and outside the home, don't result in criminal convictions. So checks on previous convictions can't be relied on to weed out potential abusers. Like many women, I'd like to see more men involved in childcare. In the seventies this seemed an unproblematic feminist desire. But that was before we'd recognised the prevalence of child sex abuse. We now know too much to return to that earlier, simple optimism. If more men are to be actively recruited into child-

care, adequate supervision is vital if we're to ensure the safety of children. Jayne Egerton, 23 Speldhurst Road, London E9 7EH.

WHY is a good man hard to find? It's hardly that women freeze them out with jokes, banter and other forms of harassment. Equal opportunities for men are not the issue — the men who do choose to enter caring professions still scale the promotion ladder relatively fast. But it's a ladder placed on a sinking soil. The declining relative pay of all feminised public-sector occupations is what puts men off. Sure, there should be no more reason for women to accept lower pay than men, but so long as they do, occupations will tend to be staffed by one sex or other. Irene Bruegel, South Bank University, Wandsworth Road, London SW8 2JZ.

In caring professions, men often face the same situations as women in jobs where they are very much in the minority: you often find yourself excluded from the informal social networks at work. You also find out how subtle and unconscious sexual harassment can be. More equal representation of men and women across the professions will not occur until we all start to change society's attitudes and expectations. Ken Cole, Brockholes View, Preston PR1 4BH.

Heysham: a nuclear reaction

ONCE again we see the use of the emotive term "meltdown" when there was no question of it arising (New Statesman, 19 March 19). The refuelling safety case accepts that stops and snags can happen. In this event, the reactor will automatically shut itself down — as it did at Heysham 2. In this case the fuel assembly suggested some three to four metres above the reactor core, and during the entire process of removal and replacement the cooling systems continued to work.

The decision to stop on-load refuelling at both stations was taken by Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear as a prudent measure, and reflects our safety-first approach. Although our investigation is not completed, early indications are that this is a "one-

A Flick back

YOU say that, among others, I was involved in Oxford University's negotiations connected with the acceptance of Mr Gert-Rudolph Flick's gift, the creation of the Chair, etc (Shame behind the name, March 13).

This is not the case. My only connection with the Chair was that I was consulted about the field of knowledge to which the Chair was to be devoted. Presumably as a result of this I was appointed by the university to the Board of Electors to the Professorship, and we made what seems to me to be an excellent appointment.

My point is that I had nothing to do with the obtaining of the gift or the negotiations which led to its acceptance. I was not consulted about this at any stage.

I should be grateful if you would correct the impression that you gave that I was in some way one of those who persuaded the university to accept the gift. Sir Isaiah Berlin, Headington House, Old High Street, Headington, Oxford OX3 9HU.

Letters to the Editor may be faxed on 0171-837 4530 or e-mailed to letters@guardian.co.uk. Please include a full postal address, even on e-mailed letters, and a telephone number. We may edit letters: shorter ones are more likely to appear. We reserve the

Another view of the graffiti war

HILARY LAW and Nicola Watson (Letters, March 20) want to blame Simon Sunderland for all the problems of Sheffield's graffiti. Yes there is a lot in Sheffield. Much is grim and offensive. But Simon's work was colourful and creative and did not threaten anyone except those architects and councillors who believe that everything on our estates should be dull and drab and uniform. Sheffield's real problems are ones

of situation — and the fact that we have already refuelled over 150 stringers at Heysham 2 without difficulty seems to bear this out. The reactor was returned safely to power with the agreement of the regulator, Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, and has operated safely at full power since Hinkley Point B and Hunterston are of a different design and continue to refuel on-load without difficulty.

You claim that the details of the fuelling problem at Heysham "have been kept secret". Not so. In our fortnightly station newsletters, progress on return to power of Reactor 8 was consistently reported. Sir Noel Davies, Chairman, Nuclear Electric plc, 123 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5EA.

and jobs. That's down to Tory policies. But Sheffield is also cursed by the debts hung round its neck for the world student games fiasco and the ill-conceived super tram project. National and local policies have created a huge layer of victims who try to exist with sense and dignity. Five years for Simon's graffiti says that the victims are to blame for the mess created by others. Gordon Arthur

Planting an alternative

THE Plant Commission did not recommend the Alternative Vote (Hugo Young's Commentary, March 19). It recommended the Supplementary Vote. The Supplementary Vote, which I designed in 1989, removes perverse results which sometimes occur under the Alternative Vote. Under the latter, it is possible for first-count, third-place candidates to win. Under the Supplementary Vote, only those placed first or second on the first count can win.

The Supplementary Vote provides for greater proportionality than the present system. Nevertheless, some people recommend that the Supplementary Vote could be topped up with electoral lists. I have an open mind. The Alternative Vote, under the latter, it is possible for first-count, third-place candidates to win. Under the Supplementary Vote, only those placed first or second on the first count can win.

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A Country Diary

DIRRIE MORE: On a cloudless day I drove over this vast tract of open moorland and lochs lying in Wester Ross between Ullapool and Garve. Although the moorland may seem desolate at this time of the year the general scenery is dramatic as the area is brooded over by the hills of Ben Wyvis, the Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and An Teallach — all with extensive snow fields. A dead mountain hare in white winter coat was a road casualty and quite a surprise. In eastern parts of the Highlands, the hares are, in parts, very common but in the west they are few and far between, partly because of the wet conditions and higher rainfall. So the chances of such a road casualty on the Dirrie More was very low although it is admittedly a fast road. Because there are more mountain hares in the east, golden eagles there stand much more chance of rearing two chicks successfully. In the west,

either turf the younger chick out of the nest or eat its sibling. Not far from the dead hare is a small area of bright green grassland adjacent to a fast-flowing burn. There is a small bottle in one corner and the field is so bright green that even in the summer it still stands out from the surrounding moorland. Like many other parts of the Highlands the grassland looks as if it has been "improved" by fertilisers but I sometimes wonder if this is the case. There used to be an old drove road over the moorland along which small black cattle would have been driven down from Sutherland. It was the first of the larger trysts at Muir of Ord. Could the bright green grassland have nothing to do with artificial fertilisers? Could it have been enriched by cattle droppings when the area was used as an overnight stop where the cattle rested and fed before continuing their long journey south.

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Diary

Joanna Coles

THERE was much to recommend the gentle technique of Martin Bashir in his interview with the Queen of Hearts. However, I hear Diana may be planning a rather more aggressive sequel. She has been lurching my obsessively shy friend the director Nick Broomfield - who I am assured appears so frequently in his own films only with the greatest of reluctance - with a view to making a film together. Having previously focused on such endearing subjects as Eugene Terreblanche and the Hollywood Madam herself, Heidi Fleiss, Nick's myopic eye for detail is not in doubt. I am sure Diana Kensington Madam will be less fly-in-the-wall than the fly-in-the-ointment. "She is," Broomfield has been murmuring softly, "stamp a force of nature."

MEANWHILE my friend Mandy Davidson looks on upward and onward. Summoned to see Tony Blair this week, one of Labour's more popular shadow ministers rapped upon the leader's door at the appointed hour. "Come!" replied the reply. And in stride the shadow minister only shadow Blair was to be seen, where Mandy sat happily singing his legs from the leader's chair.

AFTER a lengthy and expensive battle for exclusive legalisation rights, the DJ has finally secured the book of the month. As for Perkins, A Harman, a Hanged Man, by Ronnie Bergan. Day's extract sees Tony Blair in Cardiff where he would have known about his penchant for cannabis but for an unfortunate incident. Over the phone, Tony, who has grown the cannabis at his Los Angeles home, though avoid customs by post to the hotel in Cardiff where he was due to stay. But in a severe case of jet lag or just the effect of the postal service (surely the former), the package arrived five days before he did. "Alas! Tony, there just happen to be another guest staying at the hotel also. The name of Perkins was promptly opened. Puzzled, he peered it on to the local police who were more than happy to join the welcoming party when Tony eventually arrived. However, Ronald gives a lengthy explanation apropos his decision to refer to Mr Perkins as Tony through the book, even though just him but once and brief."

WELLED to see my friend Amy Jenkinson writing so passionately Independent yesterday, who is only 29, has written the screenplay for the TV series. BBC TV, and eagerly counted just how difficult it was to get her idea accepted when she dumped her initial career in Spain and embarked on the writing of a thriller. "Tonal of the story is dog-eat-dog; if you have talent, you will, with persistence, get there in the end." Of course you will. A high coincidence then to find her writing on the set page as her step-sister Polly Toyne and, even more coincidentally, a old stomping ground of her late father, the columnist Peter Jenkins.

ARGON alert: The latest BBC management memo (where else?) points out that staff may have noticed new signs in the corridors at TV Centre. The memo is headed: "Improving Directional Signage."

CONGRATULATIONS to British Airways which celebrated its inaugural flight from Heathrow to Gatwick on Sunday. Indeed, the new route was deemed so exciting that an entire panel of Harare journalists forsook the thrill of reporting Robert Mugabe's nail-biting presidential campaign, to admire the wonders of Gatwick. Shame then that the plane was diverted to Glasgow. No matter, said BA, we'll fly you to Heathrow. Alas the shuttle was already overbooked. The backs were finally arrived eight hours later than scheduled - by train.



Heads in clouds of poison

Commentary Iugo Young

WHO are judges? What is a court? Upholder of the legal order, arbiter of disputes within it, punisher of those who break its laws, bulwark against wreckers who want to change the rules they don't happen to agree with. Perhaps especially the last. That's where judges, appointed for the rest of their active lives, come up against the transient agents of the state, otherwise known as politicians. Judges defend the rule of law against those who favour the rule of men, preferably themselves.

The Government, the pious preacher of its attachment to law and order, has an increasing problem with judges. At home and abroad, British politicians are fighting courts more resentfully than they have ever done before. Judges are making some inconvenient decisions, so ministers want to alter the nature of the judicial transaction as commonly understood. The most

prominent is Michael Howard. He wants to take a tranche of power away from judges, transferring to officials under his supervision the decision on prison sentences for multiple rapists and other men of violence. With such candour as only the de-sensitised autocrat could muster, he deems judges no longer qualified to sentence these serious criminals. He says so with a pitying but unapologetic air, as if relieving the bench of the consequences of its own incompetence. Without a tremor of alarm, he glides into the territory, commonplace in the old Soviet Union, of administrative punishment.

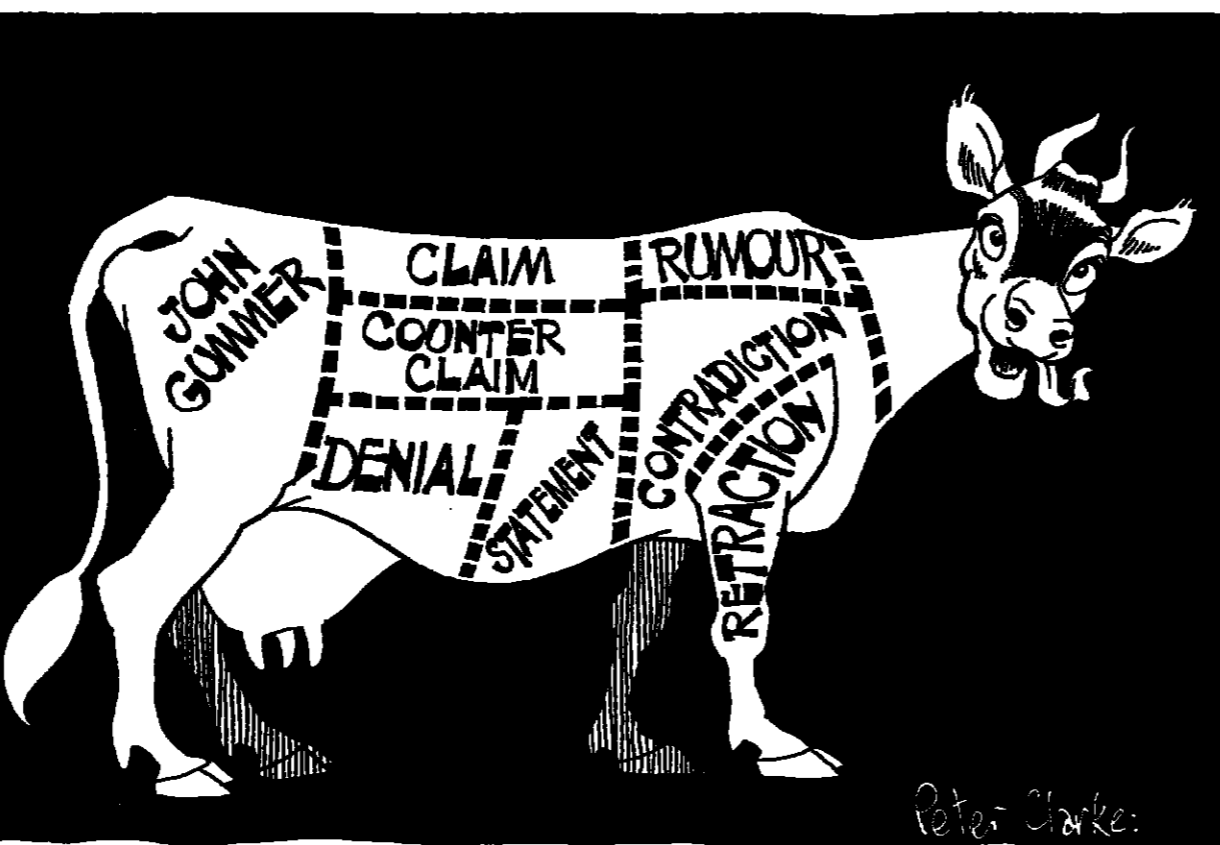
Just because it finds that Spanish fishermen have been damaged by an illegal British decision to exclude them from British waters, the Court is consigned by *bien pensant* sceptics, whose zeal exceeds their education, to the same category of disservice enemies as Jacques Delors. The European Union, however, is a legal order, and like every legal order it needs an adjudicating body to settle disputes and develop law. Every member signed up to the Court when they joined the Union. So obvious was its necessity, and so inevitable the supra-national character of the rulings it would be called upon to make, that, in the days when sanity prevailed, nobody questioned

this aspect of the enterprise. There were always doubts about fish. There were never many doubts about where laws would lead, although it was nearly 20 years before national courts and the ECJ were obliged to decide that in a conflict between British and European law, Europe counted for more. This can certainly be an uncomfortable discovery. It is galling to be told by European judges that the famous opt-out from the social chapter is not so comprehensively drafted as the regime they propose would. It is infuriating to find that Spanish trawlers are perfectly entitled, and industrially organised, to scoop up fish from British waters. But it would be equally infuriating if no body of law, backed by no tradition of enforcement, punished French farmers for impeding British agriculture exports, or stung the Italians for cheating on their milk quotas. These are such elements

mentary points that I feel embarrassed to weary the reader by making them. Yet such is the state of all-round public fury, and so facile are the nihilistic prescriptions of those who experience it, that it must fall to one newspaper in a sea of jingoistic insecurity to make some minimal statements of the obvious. And here, if you look behind the rhetoric, the Government argues. Whatever spectres Nicholas Budgen MP conjures

They talk of the European Court as if it were an optional extra in the Europe system

cal British cock-up is a familiar mixture of factors. Traditional Whitehall secrecy and the information are selected to be candid with the public. Last night's freephone offer - a recorded message from the Chief Medical Officer - was instantly mocked. In the absence of a freedom-of-information-culture any title of information are selected by newspapers and consumer groups, sometimes blown up out of all proportion, as Tony MP's claim. It is a vicious circle, made worse because science is central to the understanding of the issues at stake and most of us are pig-ignorant about science. Scientists themselves are divided. Science's responsibilities extend to facilitating informed debate, but not to predicting what the tabloids will do with its cautiously-worded warnings. It is a safe bet that the Mail will be on Ms Harman's side - for a change - this morning. We have been here before, with the old Minister of Agriculture, a producers' lobby which Thatcherism would not have tolerated in any other industry. It wants a consumer-driven Ministry of Food and Farming. It may not have the right to BSE or terday's tough choices. But it might have rebalanced the equation.



Pig in the middle

Michael White argues that in times of mad cows, government has to balance consumer with producer, while below, Mary Midgley deplores blindness to our kinship with the non-human world

IF FARMERS were coalminers the present Government would long since have destroyed their bargaining power, abolished their costly subsidies and, very probably, replaced their toxic by-products with wholesome gas from the North Sea. But farmers are a special breed of producers. They may not be as intimately bound to an increasingly suburbanised Conservative Party as they once were. But they are still close enough to warrant sensitive treatment as well as industrial support-systems that would make widget-makers weep with envy. Yesterday the Commons got only seven minutes into the BSE statement before Harriet Harman was reminding MPs how John Gummer once forced-fed his daughter with a hamburger, and only nine minutes in before Tony MP started crying "cheap, 'scar-mongering' or 'disgraceful' as Labour's health spokesman demanded tighter monitoring of beef production. It was much the same when the House last debated BSE and its putative human disease, shortly after the last election in July 1992. Farmers

like Paul Marland, Chris Gill and Elaine Kellett-Bowman warned against food scares and the damage they might do to Britain's enormous beef industry. Opposition MPs led by Labour's then agriculture spokesman, David Clark, warned against complacency and sought greater protection for the food chain. He also managed to accuse ministers of putting farm profits in 1979 before safety by abandoning draft regulations which Labour had prepared to stop cows eating scrapie from sheep. Dr Clark's successor, Gavin Strang, plays the same card - penny-pinching and deregulation - over the fall in scientific research and regulation. In fact much has changed since 1979. It has done so, slowly but steadily, since the three-year gap between the first diagnosis of mad cow's disease in November 1986 and the Government's interventions to exclude cattle off-

brains, spinal cords and the rest - from any chance of ending up in meat pies. A classic case of too little, too late? Many MPs think so. But it is not a straightforward left-right or even producer-consumer split. Some Labour MPs even feel their agriculture team has gone a bit soft on the farmers in recent years (ever New Labour) while the ever-independent Tam Dalyell - the New Scientist's man at Westminster - is on the side of the farmers and the scientists against the scare-mongers. "What do they think they're doing to the British farming industry?" he asks. Paul Tyler, the Cornish Liberal Democrat who posed a string of questions in 1992 said yesterday that his farmers would be as angry today as his other constituents. "They'll feel let down too. The farmers have done everything that was asked of them," said Tyler. What makes this a typi-

Away with superstition

ONCE again our rulers are confronted by the possibility that "mad cow disease" has infected humans. The Government's own investigatory committee reports that it has found a new strain of Kreutzfeldt-Jakob's Disease, the disease which is suspected - and has been suspected since the late 1980s - to result from such infection. But is it, they now ask, really the same disease? Inquiries are again to be made. We shall certainly see those in power react with a certain familiar sort of inertia. The sources of their resistance deserve attention. Besides the mere inertia of any government which is asked to change its mind - besides the simple habit of secrecy - we surely see here a special characteristic of our civilisation. It is a rational, a conception strongly entrenched among members of the establishment throughout this century. Rationality, in this view, makes three rulings which bear on this case. First, rationality tells us always to assume that current policies are sensible and that the world is steady and uniform. Change as such is unlikely. Secondly, therefore, we need not alter our policy unless there is incontrovertible evidence that something unexpected has happened. This raising of the standards of evidence is treated as an irresistible demand of science. And thirdly - a rather different matter - rationality tells us that the human race is cut off by an insurmountable barrier from all the rest of nature. Other life forms exist only as a hum-

blem for the life around us? In our culture, this thought does not usually take a religious form. The Christian Church has largely denied any sacredness to non-human nature, and the secular worship of Mammon which has followed Christianity takes the same line. It too allows only one divinity. But the link between deliberate blindness to the kinship and mutual dependence of all life and blindness to our own future dangers surely makes perfectly good sense in secular terms. There is nothing superstitious about it. Whereas Wells's vision of humanity as the kind of independent quasi-divine figure sitting in judgment on the whole biosphere surely is superstitious. Which picture are we going to endorse today? Outside these circles, however, increasing numbers of people now want to make both these kinds of protests and to link them together in a way which our own culture - unlike many others - has for some centuries officially rejected. People are shocked at the brutal way in which we treat animals and plants. They also see reason to believe that we are bringing about environmental disasters. And they see the one thing as a suitable consequence of the other. How (they ask) can we expect to be safe and prosperous ourselves if we show no respect

What sort of a woman are we?



Isabel Hilton

IN THE days before political correctness, an anecdote used to circulate about George Bernard Shaw and a lady on a train. It went like this: he put to her the proposition that she sleep with him for £500. An offer which, after some hesitation she accepted. He put the further proposition that she do so for five shillings. She responded indignantly, "What sort of woman do you take me for?" "Madam," he replied, "that," already been established. Now we're haggling over the price.

A similar negotiation is underway in Geneva, a town where harlotry has been raised to a diplomatic art. The question there is how many lives is the EU prepared to sacrifice for the promise of Airbus sales?

On Monday the annual session of the UN Human Rights Commission opened its six-week session. In the final week, towards the end of April, the 53 members will have to decide whether to approve a resolution condemning China for human-rights abuses. The commission has never managed to achieve this feat, though last year it surprised itself, first by voting on the issue at all and second by failing to approve it by just one vote, after Russia decided late in the proceedings to throw in its lot with China.

Two years ago the US decided to separate the question of Most Favoured Nation trade status from the issue of human rights, as far as the People's Republic was concerned. It was understood that the US administration would compensate for the relaxing of pressure through MFN with a more vigorous policy in the UN Human Rights forum. So far so good. But the US was unwilling, giving the bright sparkle of the Chinese market, to go to the aid of the critical policeman. The US and the EU would act as co-sponsors and joint lobbyists in Geneva this year. Both have argued that the way to improve China's political record is through constructive engagement, in the hope that rising prosperity in China will bring better political behaviour.

Earlier this month, the US State Department published its annual human-rights review. It is never what you might call an encouraging read, but this year it contained a particularly bleak assessment of the success to date of constructive engagement: economic liberalisation in China had not brought political

cal reform. In fact the plight of Chinese citizens had worsened. The US had sacrificed its ability to influence Beijing's behaviour and had been rewarded, as the report said, with the following results. By the end of 1995, almost all public dissent against the central authorities had been silenced by intimidation, exile or imprisonment. Had the trade balance benefited? Unfortunately not. Though the overall volume of trade had risen, so had the negative balance.

Back, then, to Geneva, where the displeasure of China's trading partners was to find expression. On February 18, the EU and the US representatives met to coordinate their approach. They agreed to present a resolution. But on March 8, when the EU representatives met in Rome, they backtracked and postponed the commitment to present a resolution until the EU foreign ministers' meeting next Monday and Tuesday. What had happened in the meantime? European leaders had been busy in the Far East. They had attended the first-ever Asia-Europe summit and one or two had taken advantage of the trip to chat to the Chinese about business.

The Chinese are deciding between Boeing and Airbus for contracts that could be worth in excess of \$2 billion. President Chirac held talks in Bangkok with Li Peng and unconfirmed reports in the French media have it that progress was made. Human rights was not high on the Bangkok agenda.

TO SACRIFICE such a large trading opportunity for the sake of taking a stand on human rights would be a large political decision. The irony is that, so far, there is little evidence that such sacrifices are really called for. When the German parliament held hearings on Tibet last year, it was against a background of furious protests from Beijing. But the hearings went ahead and German trade was not suffered. The threat of a resolution in Geneva has already produced a flurry of activity in the Chinese National People's Congress, which passed a law on Sunday giving suspects the right to be heard of privilege of being treated as refugees until proven guilty. The NPC also reduced the legal length of detention without an arrest warrant from several months to 30 days.

The first measure has brought China into line with UN requirements, which carries the implication that UN standards on torture and criminal process could be productive leverage points. If Western countries were prepared to be robust, but if the EU fails to support the US this time, the resolution will certainly fail and it will be all too clear what sort of woman the EU has become. After that, it is just a question of the price.

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Tom Enders

In defence of the indefensible

TOM ENDERS, one of the cleverest and best-bred Americans of his generation...

He was lured into the gross simplicities of grand strategy as waged by the presidencies of Nixon and Reagan

But from the perspective of a young man formally declared the most gifted scholar of his year at Yale...

chief of mission in Cambodia in the early 1970s, he deliberately stalled and misled congressional investigators...

price rise and the energy crisis, and virtually founded the International Energy Agency...

Then the Reagan presidency called him back to the Cold War's front lines in Latin America...

regime of El Salvador, and veterans of Argentina's "dirty war" were hired to train counter-insurgency teams...

Enders began by talking to the Sandinistas of Nicaragua, hoping to pursue a twin-track approach of serious negotiations...

Enders began by talking to the Sandinistas of Nicaragua, hoping to pursue a twin-track approach of serious negotiations...



Enders... front line Cold War diplomat

Enders... front line Cold War diplomat. Photographed by Martin Walker. Thomas Enders, diplomat, born November 23, 1931; died March 17, 1996.

Madhaviah Krishnan

Silent journey to the forest

MADHAVIAH Krishnan, who has died aged 83, was one of those remarkable polymaths that India produces...

While photography apart, Krishnan was also known for his photographs of mountains. He had written short stories and his Tamil novel is due to be published shortly...

He and his wife Umathi, who he married in 1955, had one son, Harikrishna, who has followed in his father's footsteps...

Realising the threat facing the forests of India and their unique plant and animal life, Krishnan threw himself into the wildlife protection movement...

Birthdays

- Marie-Christine Barraut, actress, 63; Peter Brook, theatrical producer, 71; Brian Clough, former football manager, 61; Ann Clwyd, Labour MP, 59; Timothy Dalton, actor, 59; Michael Dibdin, crime writer, 48; Geoffrey Dearmer, poet, 103; Iestyn Evans, rugby player, 32; Michael Foreman, author, illustrator, 68; Llin Golding, Labour MP, 63; Prof Richard Hare, philosopher, 77; David Heathcoat-Amory, MP, Paymaster-General, 47; Michael Heseltine, MP, Deputy Prime Minister, 63; Antony Hopkins, composer, conductor, broadcaster, 75; Alvin Kallicharran, cricketer, 47; John Mackay, soprano, 40; Matthew Maynard, cricketer, 39; Ved Mehta, author and journalist, 62; Baroness Nicol, Labour Whip in the Lords, 73; Gary Oldman, actor, 38; Mike Westbrook, band-leader, composer, 60.

Death Notices

- DOLAN, Terence Richard, 68; JAMESON, Kenneth, 17th March; PEARSON, John, 17th March; FREESTLY, on March 18th 1996 aged 85; BLOOM, on March 18th 1996 aged 85; BLOOM, on March 18th 1996 aged 85.

Paul Harry

Intensity and passion

PAUL HARRY, who died aged 63, was a tenor whose qualities did not necessarily match the clean standardised performances of the CD age...

Scholarship, the Alfred and Catherine Howard Prize for Tenors, the Mirsky Memorial Prize, and a Mendelssohn scholarship from the Boise Foundation.

His operatic debut came, a couple of weeks earlier than planned, when he took over the whole run of performances of Alfredo in Opera 90...

Israeli Opera recalled — by his skill not only in the music but in acquiring the ability to sing in Hebrew...

He started singing as a boy with the Swaneas Bach Choir under John Huw Thomas, who remained a friend. He was at the Royal College, and Guildhall School where his teacher was Rudolf Piernay...

Paul Lewis Harry, opera singer and actor, born September 6, 1932; died March 8, 1996.



Paul Harry with Anna Steiger in ENO's Makropulos Case

Pamelo Mounk'a

Sweet voice of the Congo

PAMELO MOUNK'A, who has died aged 50, was a sweet-voiced, Congolese singer, a distinguished composer and part of the early 1980s African music wave...

whole school of music. In Brussels they recorded his Ritmo Del Congo and other Mounk'a compositions. Later in 1984, with conflict between the two Congos...

the wedding of another Congolese hero, the guitarist and composer Papa Noel. Late last year he returned to Brazzaville, suffered a relapse and never recovered.

Jackdaw



detonates, the whole building moves underfoot, and insulation rains down from the ceiling. The fire alarms go off. The lifts lock. Helen keeps reading the news, but around her there are suddenly people everywhere, running to the windows...

Bunny boom

IT WOULD be good to have a chat with the News Bunny, but we can't. He's standing in the Tanworth by-election, and is spending the day campaigning. A cardboard sign is propped up on his desk...

one notices an IRA statement put out on the wire sometime in the last hour... By 7.35 pm, we still don't know where the bomb is. The 94th floor is full of people staring fruitlessly out of the windows into the blackness...

the reporters looks up from her phone and shouts across the office: "No News Bunny for these bulletins, everyone."

Key questions

UNTIL just the other day, I thought the computer had greatly enhanced my life and income and, despite some obvious dislocations, those of most other Americans as well...

digitised voices has greatly reduced the cost of everyone's phone calls and that the former operators now operate mobile answering services in the comfort of their Nebraska homes...

Disconnected

SOMETIMES I wonder about this job. Here I am, in the grounds of a mansion in Las Vegas, jostling and craning my neck to get a look at John Wayne Bobbitt's penis...

Felix Rohatyn calls a "new technological aristocracy"

Max Frankel wonders about the present future in the New York Times magazine.

Disconnected

SOMETIMES I wonder about this job. Here I am, in the grounds of a mansion in Las Vegas, jostling and craning my neck to get a look at John Wayne Bobbitt's penis...

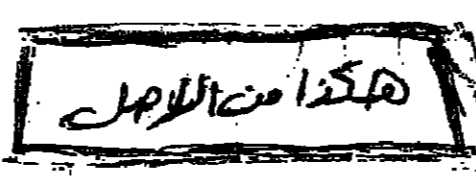
Richard Grant visits the set of John Wayne Bobbitt's latest "movie" for Esquire

Richard Grant visits the set of John Wayne Bobbitt's latest "movie" for Esquire.

Jackdaw wants your jewels

Jackdaw wants your jewels. E-mail jackdaw@guardian.co.uk; Fax 0171-713 3666; Jackdaw, The Guardian, 119 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3ER.

Dan Glaster



Financial Editor: Alex Brummer
Telephone: 0171-239-9610
Fax: 0171-833-4456

Finance Guardian

High street spending rises

City sceptical about further rate cuts

Larry Elliott
Economics Editor

THE CITY was last night sceptical about the prospect of further interest rate cuts, after the latest set of high street statistics showed consumer spending on the increase. Despite gloomy news from Britain's engineering sector, forward rates in London's money markets reflected the growing belief among dealers that base rates may have bottomed out at 6 per cent. Data from the Central Statistical Office showed that the volume of retail sales rose by 0.6 per cent in February, cancelling out the decline seen in January. The official figures confirmed a recent upbeat survey of shops and stores from the Confederation of British Industry and underlined the gradual pick-up in activity since mortgage rates were first reduced last Autumn. In the three months to February — a better guide to the underlying trend than one

month's figures — retail sales were 0.7 per cent up on the previous quarter. Over the year to February, the annual rate of increase was 1.9 per cent, the fastest since April last year. Claran Barr, UK economist for Deutsche Morgan Grenfell, said: "Although patchy, the recovery in retail sales is evident. From being flat only six months ago, retail sales growth is now 2 per cent and rising." Manufacturers are hopeful that the pick-up in high street demand — underpinned by a gradual improvement in consumer confidence — will eventually ripple down the supply chain and lead to an increase in order books. But the latest quarterly survey from the Engineering Employers' Federation indicated that retailers and wholesalers are still meeting demand from stocks rather than by placing new orders. The federation's director-general, Graham Mackenzie, said recovery in the engineering industry, suffering from a dearth of new orders, particularly in the home market, was

"poised on a knife edge". Output was still rising, but at its slowest rate for two years. Output was rising at 41 per cent of firms, while 25 per cent said production was declining. For new orders, 40 per cent reported an increase against 31 per cent posting a fall. One sector of engineering that has seen a spurt in output is the motor industry, where production last month reached its highest level since records began in 1977. The EEF said it was also encouraged at the resilience of investment, a trend borne out by the latest money supply figures from the Bank of England. The annual growth in the broad measure of the money supply (M4) slipped back to just under 10 per cent last month, but a detailed breakdown of the figures showed that industry and business was increasing borrowing for investment plans. Some analysts have expressed concern at the high annual growth rate in M4 — which measures cash and bank and building society deposits — warning that it is a sign of inflation ahead. However, the minutes of the February monetary meeting between the Treasury and the Bank of England, which left base rates unchanged, show Chancellor Kenneth Clarke relaxed about the monetary data. He said it was "not clear that M4 growth posed an inflationary threat at the moment".

New hopes of end to housing recession

Tony May and Larry Elliott

MORTGAGE lenders and house builders yesterday expressed cautious optimism that the seven-year recession in the property market is over, as the impact of lower interest rates began to feed through into activity. With the key spring buying season about to begin, Beazer Homes, the UK's second-largest house builder, said it could detect signs of improvement after the depressed trading conditions of 1995. Dennis Webb, chief executive of the Bath-based group, said there was evidence of an upturn in consumer confidence due to re-assurance that mortgage interest tax relief would not be further eroded. "We have seen a market improvement in the last quarter of the 1995 calendar year and since Christmas," he said. This was supported by an increase in reservations for homes. At the end of December the

group had completed 2,001 homes at an average selling price of £67,200. Mr Webb was echoing the report two weeks ago by Wimpey, Britain's biggest housebuilder, that consumer confidence was stirring once again. The group was "cautiously optimistic" about prospects for the rest of the year. Figures released by the Building Societies Association yesterday showed gross advances by lenders falling marginally last month to £2,531 million from £2,564 million in January, while net advances after repayments of loans fell to £503 million from £760 million. But approvals of future mortgages rose steeply to £2,395 million from £2,395 million as the house-buying season picked up, according to the BSA figures. "Taken overall, indicators continue to suggest that a modest housing market recovery is now under way," said Peter Williams, head of research at the

BSA. "The latest reduction in mortgage rates, allied to stable house prices, should prompt greater housebuying interest during the spring period." Ian Shepherdson, economist at City firm HSBC, said the housing market had so far done no more than make up the ground lost in 1995. "There has been enough activity recently to keep prices rising for another couple of months, but we will need to see a revived rise in mortgage demand if the recovery is to continue into the summer and beyond." The building industry is hopeful that the worst is over. Wimpey saw its profits fall 65 per cent to £15.6 million in 1995. Beazer yesterday named weak consumer confidence for a 15 per cent fall in profits to £18.5 million for the first half of its financial year. Mr Webb said of the second half: "We expect to make up some of the fall in profit but we do not see ourselves catching up the shortfall from the first half." Marley plc, a building materials manufacturer reported that its 1995 profit was down 8.8 per cent to £43.6 million and blamed the slowdown in the housing market in both the UK and the US. Its chairman, Sir George Russell, said: "In both countries a more positive mood appears to be developing."

Notebook

Regulators keep firm grip on BT



Edited by Alex Brummer

THE bad blood which has marred the relationship between Ofel and British Telecom may have been leached out — on the orders of new BT chief executive Sir Peter Bonfield — but the regulator has lost none of its passion in defence of the consumer. As Ofel's consultative document shows, it is intent on continuing the price restraints on the telecom group. The new wholesale price cap on network services, first put forward in December and detested by BT, remains in place. The upper end of the proposed range for the annual price cap would be significantly tighter than the present inflation minus 7.5 per cent formula which BT blames for the bulk of its reduced profits. The only crumb of comfort for BT is that the regulator after listening to the capital markets, has accepted that its network is not a utility. He has upped the estimate of how much BT should pay for its capital to between 9 per cent and 13 per cent. But BT still believes that 17 per cent is appropriate for an increasingly risky business. BT's main worry is that it could be left with insufficient funds to invest in upgrading its network — not a wholly convincing argument from a company which was planning to dole out \$5 billion to shareholders to sweeten a possible merger with Cable and Wireless. The group does face problems about what to do with the network, especially as software becomes available enabling people to make international and long distance calls over the Internet for the price of a local call. Maybe the time has come for shareholders, who have enjoyed handsome dividends from BT, to provide further funds. BT should also take a tough stance towards those firebrands pressing it to reject all Ofel proposals and go for a Monopolies and Mergers Commission investigation. The outcome of such an investigation could be more damaging than anything Ofel throws at them.

ral justice prevented the SFA from proceeding against them. Incompetent Messrs Baring and Tuckey may have been, but there was nothing to suggest that they acted wrongly by either omission or commission. In such circumstances, and after advice from a senior QC, it was decided not to proceed against them. The promises extracted from Mr Tuckey, about future work on the financial markets, were the best deal that could be made. Where the SFA acknowledges that it may have gone wrong is in its failure to explain itself, both in the case of the executives at the top of Barings and those against whom it is taking disciplinary action lower down the scale. The refusal to provide names, which were in the public domain through the Board of Banking Supervisors, and the Singapore inspectors' contribution, is seen as probably mistaken. The SFA, historically, has been cautious in the disclosure of names under investigation for fear of causing systemic harm. But even this does not hold water given the exposures of the mistakes of investment houses in numerous DIT investigations over the years, including NatWest in the Blue Arrow affair. As the SFA is now starting to acknowledge what is wrong in its procedures is the culture of secrecy. Charges in court are open to public scrutiny, so there is no reason why those facing SFA disciplinary proceedings should not be publicly named, too. Moreover, it is clearly inadequate that the nature of the falling, in individual cases, was not disclosed by the SFA in the Barings case. By its secrecy the SFA has done the reputation of market regulation no good at all. But at least it has the sense to recognise the error of its ways.

Lord of the rings issues 6m cards

A £100 million upgrade of the BT Chargecard service has left Danny Jennings (right), head of card services at British Telecom, with the task of mastering the issuing of six million cards to customers within six weeks, writes Nicholas Bannister. BT, which says the operation is the biggest card service of its kind in the UK, has improved the service to provide extra benefits for customers and reduce operating costs. The original service enabled customers to make calls from almost any phone in the UK and have the costs transferred to their home or office bill in the UK. The service was later extended to overseas calls made to the UK. The new cards can now be used to make calls from one overseas country to another. BT is also planning to give a 10 per cent discount on Chargecard calls home made by customers participating in its Friends & Family scheme. PHOTOGRAPH: STEWART GOLDSTEIN



City buries hatchet on order-driven trading

Patrick Donovan
City Editor

THE warring factions within the London Stock Exchange are attempting to patch up their row over the future of City share trading by today giving unanimous backing to the launch of an order trading equity market. The shake-up, the biggest market upheaval since the 1987 "Big Bang", will be announced at today's Stock Exchange board meeting. BZW deputy chief executive Donald Brydon told the all-party Treasury Select Committee. News that the recommenda-

tion will be unopposed suggests that there has been a huge about-turn by big market makers such as BZW, which had publicly opposed market reforms. BZW was one of several big City firms who have staunchly defended the present system of quote-driven dealing, under which market makers post prices at which they are prepared to trade equities. Firms such as BZW have huge amounts of capital tied up in market making operations, allowing them to offer competing prices in exchange for risking their own money to hold shares and make a continuous market. Instead, there are now

plans for an order-driven market which electronically matches buy and sell orders. The debate over the change has raged through the City and was a factor in the recent sacking of the former Stock Exchange chief executive, Michael Lawrence. Mr Brydon denied that BZW had opposed changes because it was afraid of losing the huge profits it generates through the traditional market-making system. He angrily rebutted suggestions by Labour MP Diane Abbott that BZW and the other two biggest City houses had effectively "rigged the market". He insisted that BZW had a change of heart after study-

ing the findings of a consultation by the Stock Exchange authorities, and rubbished claims by the ousted Mr Lawrence that he had been the victim of a "market maker's coup". "This is absolutely wrong," Mr Brydon told the committee hearing. Mr Brydon, who had been party to Mr Lawrence's removal at a January 4 board meeting, described the former chief executive's behaviour as "unacceptable". His management style was "generally unsafe", he added. Stock Exchange chairman John Kemp-Welch, who separately appeared before the MPs, refused to comment on

today's expected market reforms. But he shed more light on the acrimonious row over the market's future, saying that every member of the Exchange board voted against Mr Lawrence remaining when the proposal was put to them at a January 4 meeting. Mr Kemp-Welch also responded to an allegation by Mr Lawrence that he had said, just before the latter was fired, that market makers were always wrong. Mr Kemp-Welch said it was a "lighthearted remark, made in reference to his competition with market makers when he worked at brokerage firm Cazenove before joining the Exchange.

Germany acts to stamp out new wave of corruption

Kevin Liffey in Bonn

A WAVE of corruption cases in business and public administration has forced the German government to put forward tougher prison sentences, including five years for bribery, and wider powers of investigation. Ordinary Germans were taken aback last July by revelations that prosecutors were investigating more than 200 people at 40 companies, among them 65 past and present staff at the General Motors subsidiary Opel. The Opel investigations and a spate of other high-profile tax evasion and fraud cases have undermined Germans' belief that public life here is largely free of corruption. "The level of corruption which exists in Germany is unacceptable," said Interior Minister Manfred Kanther. "It may not be a mass crime, but the credibility of the state suffers from the actions of black sheep in public service." Justice Minister Edzard Schmidt-Jortzig said 3,000 public servants were found guilty of corruption every year, and that experts put the annual damage to the economy from corruption in all walks of life at DM4 billion (£1.7 billion). The government has already abolished a peculiar aspect of German law allowing firms to offset bribes paid to secure foreign contracts as tax-deductible expenses.

Barings bruise

PLAINLY, the Securities and Futures Authority is disturbed by the almost universal scepticism which has greeted its disciplinary procedures against former Barings directors. It takes the view that it did all within its power to find ways of bringing former chairman Peter Baring and his deputy Anthony Tuckey to book for losing the bank — but the limits imposed by nat-

Retail rebound

THE rebound in retail sales in February will come as no surprise to the bosses at Britain's leading chain stores. There is increasing confidence from larger retailers, like Marks & Spencer, that the depressed atmosphere on the high street are starting to lift and that real increases in sales are catching up to household goods is starting to come through. The view is that this confidence is being supported by the easing of the tax burdens imposed by Chancellor Norman Lamont at the height of the PSBR problem in 1993-94. In much the same way as the consumer spending slowed ahead of those increases, so it appears to be improving in anticipation of future cuts. Official figures just out show a month-on-month rise of 0.6 per cent — in line with expectations, with the three-month figure up 0.7 per cent. Not spectacular. But with April tax cuts to come and the most recent mortgage-rate reductions still to take effect, the outlook for consumer spending and, with it, the feel-good factor and the Government, seems to be improving.

US banks caught out by computer leasing scheme

Mark Tran in New York

AMERICAN banks allegedly have been conned out of hundreds of millions of dollars by a man and a woman posing as executives of tobacco group Philip Morris seeking loans for computer equipment leases. Victims of their elaborate scam included NationsBank, Signet Bank, CoreStates, Bank of Montreal, Hitachi American Credit, Credit Alliance and Long Term Credit Bank of Japan. Signet, based in Richmond, Virginia was the most heavily exposed with \$81 million in loans, but said it expected to recover a "substantial" amount. NationsBank parted with \$60 million but also expected to get some back. The FBI arrested Edward Reiners and Judy Bachman after an intensive three-day,

around-the-clock investigation by agents in New York, Atlanta and Richmond. The two have been charged with bank fraud and face up to 30 years in prison and \$1 million in fines if convicted. The pair allegedly hatched the scheme in 1993. Pretending to work for Philip Morris, where Mr Reiners was a former employee, the two approached banks for funding, the Department of Justice said. The banks thought they were lending money to control leasing company in Richmond providing equipment for Philip Morris in research conducted offshore. "This scheme was further enhanced by the fact that Reiners, a former Philip Morris employee, had done business with one of the principals as a representative of Philip Morris," the Justice Department said.

French throw weight behind Airbus rejig

Mark Miller
European Business Editor

CHANGES to the corporate structure at Airbus Industrie this summer appear more likely, with France's Aerospatiale reportedly to have thrown its weight behind reform. British Aerospace and Germany's Deutsche Aerospace (Dasa) have both called for a different structure in an attempt to make the European commercial jet maker more competitive in the face of the threat posed by US manufacturers, notably Boeing. Yesterday, the Bloomberg wire service quoted an Aerospatiale spokesman as describing the French group's chief executive as saying that he was "completely in favour of this; he's even said that it should be done as soon as possible". On Tuesday, Norbert Lammer, Germany's co-ordinator for the aerospace industry, warned: "The success of Airbus is certain in the long term only if the partners agree right now to an efficient, international competitive structure." British Aerospace has also made no secret of its desire to see changes to the structure of Airbus Industrie, which at present consists of a groupement d'intérêt économique — where Airbus handles the sales and marketing and the

manufacturing work is parcelled out among the partners. Aerospatiale and Dasa each account for 38 per cent of Airbus, BAE a further 20 per cent and Spain's Casa the remaining 4 per cent. Critics have argued that the arrangement is both inefficient and cumbersome, which ought to be replaced by a conventional corporate structure. Airbus' competitive edge has also been dulled by the fall in the value of the dollar — in which aircraft are priced — against, in particular the mark and the French franc. A special committee is already looking at possible changes and is due to present its conclusions at the end of May or early June. The industrial logic for change has been widely accepted but observers have noted that change could run into political interests — Aerospatiale, for example, is state owned. However, there are signs that the French government may be facing up to the consequences of global competition. It has thrown its weight behind a restructuring of the defence industry by urging a merger between Aerospatiale and the privately owned Dassault group.

Guardian Live Wire debate

TUC General Secretary John Monks will be our guest for the second Guardian Live Wire Debate on the Internet next Sunday from 7pm to 9pm. Advance questions can be sent to: john.monks@guardian.co.uk. Log on to the debate at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/livewire>

TOURIST RATES — BANK SELLS

Australia 1.92	France 7.46	Italy 2.335	Singapore 2.11
Austria 15.20	Germany 2.20	Japan 0.5425	South Africa 1.55
Belgium 45.00	Greece 363.00	Netherlands 2.47	Spain 194.00
Canada 2.02	Hong Kong 11.65	New Zealand 2.19	Sweden 10.04
Cyprus 0.8975	India 50.87	Norway 0.80	Switzerland 1.7650
Denmark 6.50	Ireland 0.9550	Portugal 227.50	Turkey 99.000
Finland 6.98	Israel 4.73	Saudi Arabia 5.70	USA 1.4975

Supplied by NatWest Bank (excluding Indian rupee and Israeli shekel).



In the swim... Land Rover's Jungle Track demonstration ground at Solihull opens to the public today as part of national Science, Engineering and Technology week. PHOTOGRAPH BY IAN KING

Blair takes on late payers

Celia Weston
Enterprise Editor

LEADER of the Opposition Tony Blair yesterday laid claim to Labour as the party of small business as he pledged to introduce a legal right for companies to charge interest on late payment of commercial debt.

"I would argue today, what a few years ago would have seemed a bold claim, that it is Labour, and not the Conservatives, who appreciate and understand the value of small businesses and the role they can play in creating a gen-

uinely dynamic economy." His speech was warmly welcomed by some representatives of small and medium-sized firms who praised his courage and "useful" policies on late payment. Others, such as the Confederation of British Industry and the British Chambers of Commerce, remain vehemently opposed to Labour's late payment proposals.

He said: "We need a society in which we don't have to choose between old-fashioned state control and the Government doing nothing — failed laissez faire."

Mr Blair's latest declaration continues the contest be-

tween Opposition and the Government to woo smaller business voters and follows the Prime Minister's promise last week to continue cutting red tape and to take action soon on late payment. Mr Major said the third competitiveness white paper, due to be published in early June, would contain further measures to help smaller firms while Trade and Industry Secretary Ian Lang yesterday pledged to deal with tightening up payment times in the autumn.

Fighting to regain the initiative in the current charm offensive, Mr Blair yesterday unveiled Labour's document.

The Growth Agenda, a package of measures aimed at small and growing companies.

On late payment, he said: "Paying your bills late brings a financial gain to the defaulter. We need to create a situation in which late payment is not worth it."

The statutory right to interest should only apply to payment by companies above a certain threshold but government and public agencies should be required to pay their bills within 30 days and publish information about payment practices.

A statutory right to interest was an entitlement, he said,

and it would be up to the creditor to decide whether to use it. "We will consult on the best method of implementing this proposal so that small firms gain the maximum advantage and we avoid the common fear that small companies will simply end up pursuing other small businesses."

Commenting on Mr Blair's overtures, Teresa Graham, a member of the Government's deregulation task force and a of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, said later: "Let's hope this is the start of a real and consistent commitment to the small and medium-sized enterprise sector."

Otherwise, we're all pissing in the wind."

Stan Mendham, chief executive of the Forum of Private Business pressure group, said he was delighted with the tone of Mr Blair's speech, that it had been "courageous stuff" and that New Labour was "definitely shaping up."

Other measures in The Growth Agenda include:

- an "Enterprise Zone" internet site to give easy access to business information;
- enhancing the Business Links network;
- the creation of a database listing British exporters;
- cutting tax compliance costs.

Ministers look at ways to beat agm rowdies

Ian King

THE Government is looking at ways of limiting the disruption of company annual general meetings like those demonstrations seen recently at British Aerospace, British Gas and Lloyds Bank.

John Taylor, the corporate affairs minister, said yesterday that in many cases agms were "unsatisfactory". He acknowledged, however, that it would be "difficult" to legislate against single-issue pressure groups, which "plagued" some meetings.

But Mr Taylor told the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators in London, there were ways of improving the access shareholders had to company boards at agms.

He said the Government was reviewing sections of the Companies Act, which allow shareholders to have resolutions placed on an agm's agenda, but which currently require them to meet the cost of doing so.

The Government was also mulling over a trade and industry select committee suggestion that companies should bear the cost of circulating shareholder resolutions where they were supported by enough investors.

He went on: "Requiring the company to meet the costs of circulation could be unfair to shareholders as a whole, and a group of shareholders proposing a resolution might represent a tiny fraction of the voting equity."

"But if shareholders are able to submit their resolution in time, this concern is diminished."

The past two years have seen an increase in the number of agms disrupted by protesters. Last month, Hanson's agm was interrupted by environmentalists angered at the group's mining activities in the United States.

Lloyds' agm, called to approve the merger with TSB, was suspended after a string of questions from shareholders opposed to the bank's policy on Third World debt.

In the most famous incident of all, the British Gas agm last May was moved to the 10,000-seater Docklands Arena, to accommodate the hundreds of shareholders opposed to chief executive Cedric Brown's pay package.

But Ann Robinson, director-general of the National Association of Pension Funds, said boards should bear most responsibility for controlling agms. "The behaviour of directors and their attitude to shareholders is a crucial variable."

News in brief

Forsyth jury considers verdict

THE trial of Elizabeth Forsyth, former personal assistant to ex-Polly Peck chairman Asil Nadir, was adjourned last night after jurors failed to reach a verdict on their first afternoon of deliberations. Mrs Forsyth, 59, of Great Dunmow, Essex, denies two charges of laundering \$400,000 allegedly stolen by Mr Nadir in October 1989.

Earlier, Mr Justice Tucker told the jurors not to be "dazzled" by details of the personal wealth which emerged during the five-week trial. He said jurors had to be certain that the money had been stolen by Mr Nadir, and that Mrs Forsyth handled it dishonestly knowing it had been stolen. — *Ian King*

Britannic climbs 80pc

BRIANNIC Assurance yesterday unveiled a near 80 per cent rise in pre-tax profits at \$63.6 million for 1995. But the figures included investment gains, and the operating profit rose by only 7 per cent to \$20.6 million. The group said its 1995 sales had been lower than the previous year, but they were now recovering. It has completed a full review of its business and has already announced its withdrawal from the motor insurance market. Later this year, it will make its first foray into the health insurance sector with a critical illness policy. — *Pauline Springett*

Marley divisional sale

MARLEY, the building materials group, has agreed to sell part of its automotive division for \$53.2 million, and is in discussions on the possible sale of the rest. The board decided to withdraw from the business because of the increasingly global nature of the auto industry requiring ever increasing levels of investment.

Profits for 1995 fell 8.8 per cent to \$43.6 million, as operating margins were squeezed by a slowdown in the UK and US, which weakened demand for its concrete, clay, and plastic products. Chairman Sir George Russell said: "The prospects for 1996 depend to a significant extent on the level of activity in the housing and refurbishment markets in the UK and US." — *Tony May*

Harrisons retreats

HARRISONS & Crosfield, the chemicals and building materials group, produced a pre-tax profit of £19.6 million last year, compared to £26.7 million in 1994. The figures were in line with analysts' expectations — the 1994 profit was boosted increased by an exceptional profit on disposals. Chief executive Bill Turcan said the company had up to £250 million to spend and was keen to make bolt-on acquisitions for its Harcross UK timber merchant business. It was also interested in strategic purchases to strengthen its pigment-related chemicals operations.

The company's plans for Harcross follow a year of rationalisation which resulted in the closure of 14 of its outlets and the acquisition of four branches. Some 600 jobs were cut and Mr Turcan declined to say whether more of the remaining 3500 jobs were under threat this year. — *Pauline Springett*

'Brownfield' threat

THOUSANDS of new jobs could be created across the North of England by restoring abandoned "brownfield" sites to industrial use, the Country Landowners Association claimed yesterday. But proposals threatening "barrenness" clean-up costs for polluted land were discouraging developers, said the CLA.

New owners faced being forced to pay pollution bills where original culprits could not be traced. Offences might have been committed a century ago, said the CLA. Yorkshire and Humbershire regional secretary Ian Kibble said doubts raised by the new Environment Act proposals were forcing developers to look outside. He called for a government review of legal proposals, to devise "incentives rather than penalties". — *Maryn Halsall*

British good in lab but still failing to make it

OUTLOOK/ Larry Elliott on a report showing that Germany and Ireland are better at putting ideas into practice

THE history of innovation in post-war Britain was aptly summed up by the Ealing comedy, *The Man in the White Suit*. A talented scientist (Alec Guinness) discovers a new compound for making indestructible cloth but is prevented — by a coalition of managers, porters and the power — from turning it into a world-beating product.

Ealing's satirical message has been replicated in the real world many times since the film was released 45 years ago.

Britain has a reputation for being brilliant at invention, i.e. raw scientific discovery — but a third division outfit when it comes to innovation, i.e. actually putting the ideas into practice.

A three-country study released yesterday underlines the extent of Britain's problem. Between 1991 and 1993 a survey was undertaken of 3,500 manufacturing firms in the UK, Ireland and Germany

to test their record for innovation. The findings are chastening, if familiar. Only 81 per cent of UK firms introduced a new or improved product, against 71 per cent in Germany and 68 per cent in Ireland.

Small UK firms had particularly low innovation rates. Among firms with fewer than 100 employees, 56 per cent brought out a new product or upgraded an old one, against 66 per cent in Germany and 65 per cent in Ireland.

If anything, the survey under-recorded Germany's lead. The period under review saw a sharp post-reunification downturn in the German economy, a turning point in the UK business cycle and strong growth in the Irish economy.

As luck would have it, the Labour leader Tony Blair chose yesterday to go wooing the small business vote. The details of why the UK's innovation record is relatively poor add weight to his analy-

sis of Britain's industrial underperformance. According to research by Queen's University Belfast, the University of Strathclyde and the ifo-Institute, Munich, two of Labour's big themes — finance and skill shortages — are hampering innovation in the UK.

Financial constraints on product innovation were more important in the UK than in the other two countries, although the focus of concern was different for small and large companies.

The bigger UK manufacturers tended to cite the risk involved in developing a new product line, while smaller outfits emphasised the lack of innovation finance.

In terms of skills, the difference between Britain's family saloon approach and Germany's Rolls-Royce system of industrial training and high-quality apprenticeships is reflected in the number of new products being developed.

Around one third of British firms said that a lack of skills had hindered their product innovation, compared to only one fifth in Germany.

Among manufacturers with more than 500 employees, 40 per cent of large UK firms reported that innovation had been significantly constrained by skill shortages, against only 14 per cent

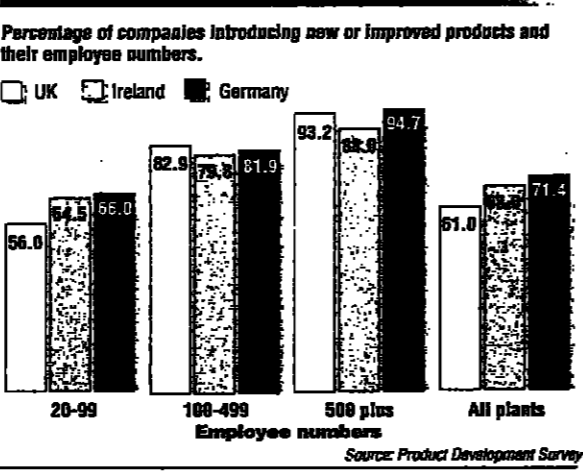
of similar plants in Germany and 17 per cent in Ireland.

The report found that product innovation is strongly linked to business growth, with sales of innovating UK firms rising 7 per cent a year against 5.1 per cent for those who kept faith with their old products.

It concluded that the efforts by the Government and others had led to some improvements in Britain's training and industrial finance, but added: "Many UK firms operate in an environment which is less conducive to innovation than that in which German firms operate. Long-term action to address these issues will be necessary if the level of innovative activity of UK businesses is to be raised."

Product Innovation and Development in UK, German and Irish Manufacturing: Northern Ireland Economic Research Centre, 46 University Road, Belfast, BT7 1NJ. Price £30.

Who innovates?



Avocet to mine London

Ian King

AVOCKET Mining, a gold and tungsten mining group with interests in Peru, Malaysia, Portugal and the United States, has announced plans for an Eastern flotation on the London market, raising £10 million and valuing it at \$85 million.

Apart from FTZ-CRA, the world's biggest mining group, Avocet will be the only British-owned, British-run and London-based pure mining company fully quoted on the London market.

Avocet, which was set up in 1987 by chief executive Jocelyn Waller, a former execu-

tive of South African mining and industrial conglomerate Anglo American, is to list in London at the behest of institutional investors in Canada, where it is quoted on the Vancouver stock exchange.

Announcing details of the flotation, Mr Waller said it had always been his ambition to bring the company to market in London, but that a Canadian listing had been more convenient in the past.

After the flotation, Mr Waller, together with Avocet's chairman, Nigel McNair Scott, another former executive at Anglo American, will own around 21 per cent of the company.

Although Avocet's main

strengths lie in gold mining — it fought off rivals including Australian giant BHP, to win its main Malaysian licence — it is also emerging as a key tungsten producer.

Mr Waller said world tungsten prices, which have been depressed over recent years due to cheap Chinese and Russian exports being "dumped" on world markets, were set to recover sharply. Now there is a shortage as Chinese stocks have dried up.

Avocet is also investing several million dollars in its Peruvian gold activities, where it employs only local workers.

"We have a strict policy of no gringos," Mr Waller said.

Bass faces heady prospect

Sarah Whitebloom

BASS and Allied Domecq yesterday refused to comment on mounting speculation about the possible multi-million-pound sale of Allied's half share in Carlsberg Tetley, the UK's third-largest brewing group.

Both companies maintained total silence during the day. But City brokers argued that the incumbent hurdles — including extremely complex difficulties with the competition authorities — put a possible deal a long way off.

It has long been predicted that Allied would dispose of its stake in its joint venture

with the Danish brewing giant Carlsberg. Allied's core business now centres around wines, spirits and pubs retailing — not traditional brewing.

But senior industry insiders urged calm yesterday, insisting that no deal is yet in sight. One City expert said: "These sort of things take months rather than weeks or days."

Brokers pointed out that any move between the large drinks houses arouses intense interest from competition authorities including the Office of Fair Trading and the Monopolies Commission. One analyst said last night: "Another problem is that Allied

simply wants too much." City estimates suggest that the stake is worth around £100 million.

Nevertheless, the rumours saw the shares in both Allied and Bass rise on the day. Allied's quote closed the day 6p up at 497p. Bass rose 8p to close at 745p.

Should Bass succeed in taking over Allied's 50 per cent stake it would leapfrog Scottish & Newcastle to become the UK's largest brewer. But if it failed to secure the competition regulators' support before taking the plunge, it would almost certainly face several more months at the negotiating table before the deal was allowed.

Underside

Dan Atkinson

CAROL GALLEY, deputy chairman of Mercury Asset Management, has found that those St Valentine's Day bouquets from Forte shareholders, thankful for Sir Rocco and selling out her role in harking off her Granada, have been replaced by hate mail.

Folsom-pen letters have arrived, we hear, from assorted chambermaids, bell-boys and others now feeling the lash of the new management.

Some people, it seems, just don't understand what shareholder value is all about.



NEXT WEEK sees the opening of Allied Domecq's new sports bar, Football Football, in the Haymarket, London, with celebs such as Newcastle's Keith Gillespie and

Manchester United's Lee Sharpe. According to the publicity there will be a hologram of Terry Venables and a walking, talking waxwork of George Best. "There should be a few genuine bar-room brawls there too," was the reaction of one City analyst.

FROM the man who brought you Domino Pizza and Cluckers rotisserie chickens comes a new concept — Bar Fades, OK, so it's actually called South Beach Café, but anywhere offering "the latest eating fashions from America" and such treats as fresh wheat-grass cocktails ("said, to clear toxins") is bound to suffer infernal associations. Tom Burnham, a former executive vice-president at Dominos, is floating this new British

venture; also on the board is the intriguingly-named Richard Other Prickett. As if you needed any further deterrent, the cafes are described as "a fun place to meet, talk, plan or just hang out, maybe listening to live music or surfing the Internet". Mr Burnham is adjunct professor of franchising and international business at Dallas University. No, really.

ERM Revisited: The publication of Politics and the Pound, the book by the FT's Philip Stephens about Britain's glorious liberation from the Everlasting Recession Machine, is a welcome antidote to the attempts by the Government (and Labour, for that matter) to convince the public that White Wednesday never existed.

One omission, though, is that when at luncheon on September 16 the panic-stricken cabal of ministers and officials decided to put up interest rates to 15 per cent as a gambler's last throw, nobody thought to mention it to the Treasury press office. Staff there only found out when a journalist rang to ask if it were true.

MEANWHILE, Pearson's 1994 purchase of "educational" video-game company Mindscape (products include Deathcap; "unspeakable evil, relentless evil, pure evil") seems to carry the sort of jinx that would be appreciated by the Mindscape clientele. Bought for £330 million, Mindscape has lost £7 million in the last year. Fur-

thermore, on at least a half a dozen occasions during this week's presentation by Pearson of its figures to the City, the mastermind of the group's expansion, managing director Frank Barlow, screwed up the slide presentation. Unspeakable evil, relentless evil etc etc.

TUESDAY'S Budget, while not exactly exciting, did manage to increase tax allowances while moving Government finances into surplus for the first time in five years. Widows, parents, electricity consumers and borrowers of state mortgages and tourist loans all did well. Too bad for Three Pints's long-suffering mainland serfs that this Budget was presented by a certain DJ Gelling, Treasury minister for the Isle of Man.

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Racing

Nwaamis can win the beer money for Dunlop

Ron Cox looks at opening day of the Flat and highlights future prospects

JOHN DUNLOP, champion trainer of the season, is wasting no time declaring his intentions for the new campaign. He is a comparatively rare visitor at the opening day of the season...

Ten to follow

GAP JULUCA (4yo): Something of a rarity, a big-race winner not Arab-owned. Progressed to win the Cambridgehire under 9st 10lb and should hold his own in the listed and Pattern company...

MARK OF ESTEEM (3yo): Touched off by Alhaarth prior to trotting up at Goodwood, this Darshaan colt is reported to have thrived since wintering in Dubai. (S bin Surroor). MICHAEL BELL'S (3yo): Bought out of Mark Johnston's yard after winning both his races over a mile, he is rated another potential money-spinner for Godolphin...

Pat Eddery's mount can take this on the way to better things. It is always a gamble whether recent all-weather track winners will reproduce their form back on turf...

Michael Bell's speedy colt runs off the same mark as when scooting in by two lengths at Lingfield last month. He showed promise on turf last year and, from his high draw, could take some pegging back. The danger is Passion For Life. Gelded since last year, the Epsom-raider has reportedly sparked in recent gallops, including when partnered by Pat Eddery...



Quest back in National picture

ROUGH QUEST is back in the reckoning for the Marton Grand National at Aintree on Saturday week. He was initially ruled out of the race after finishing second to Imperial Call in the Gold Cup last Thursday but trainer Terry Casey says the gelding could well take his chance. 'We are now considering the Grand National for Rough Quest', said Casey yesterday. 'I have entered him and he is really well and in great form. I have had discussions with owner Andrew Wates and we have decided to consider the National. We will make a final decision the weekend and not keep people hanging on.'

Grand chance... Rough Quest back on the National trail and favourite for the Aintree marathon on Saturday week

Doncaster card with guide to the form

Table of race results and form guides for Doncaster, including race numbers, names, and odds.

Wincanton National Hunt programme

Table of race results and form guides for Wincanton National Hunt, including race numbers, names, and odds.

Plumpton (N.H.)

Table of race results and form guides for Plumpton National Hunt, including race numbers, names, and odds.

Channel 4 racing schedule for Doncaster, listing race times and names.

Channel 4 racing schedule for Wincanton, listing race times and names.

Channel 4 racing schedule for Plumpton, listing race times and names.

Channel 5 racing schedule for Doncaster, listing race times and names.

Channel 5 racing schedule for Wincanton, listing race times and names.

Channel 5 racing schedule for Plumpton, listing race times and names.

Channel 6 racing schedule for Doncaster, listing race times and names.

Channel 6 racing schedule for Wincanton, listing race times and names.

Channel 6 racing schedule for Plumpton, listing race times and names.

Channel 7 racing schedule for Doncaster, listing race times and names.

Channel 7 racing schedule for Wincanton, listing race times and names.

Channel 7 racing schedule for Plumpton, listing race times and names.

Channel 8 racing schedule for Doncaster, listing race times and names.

Channel 8 racing schedule for Wincanton, listing race times and names.

Channel 8 racing schedule for Plumpton, listing race times and names.

Channel 9 racing schedule for Doncaster, listing race times and names.

Channel 9 racing schedule for Wincanton, listing race times and names.

Channel 9 racing schedule for Plumpton, listing race times and names.

Channel 10 racing schedule for Doncaster, listing race times and names.

Channel 10 racing schedule for Wincanton, listing race times and names.

Channel 10 racing schedule for Plumpton, listing race times and names.

Channel 11 racing schedule for Doncaster, listing race times and names.

Channel 11 racing schedule for Wincanton, listing race times and names.

Channel 11 racing schedule for Plumpton, listing race times and names.

Channel 12 racing schedule for Doncaster, listing race times and names.

Channel 12 racing schedule for Wincanton, listing race times and names.

Channel 12 racing schedule for Plumpton, listing race times and names.

Channel 13 racing schedule for Doncaster, listing race times and names.

Channel 13 racing schedule for Wincanton, listing race times and names.

Channel 13 racing schedule for Plumpton, listing race times and names.

Channel 14 racing schedule for Doncaster, listing race times and names.

Channel 14 racing schedule for Wincanton, listing race times and names.

Channel 14 racing schedule for Plumpton, listing race times and names.

RACELINE advertisement featuring a grid of numbers and names, likely for a betting or racing-related promotion.

FA CUP SOCCER

Sixth round replays: Liverpool 3, Leeds United 0

McManaman doubles clear of the deadlock

LIVERPOOL moved forward last night, with more discomfort than they may have anticipated, into the familiar territory of the FA Cup's last four.

They were again performed with the timidity and excessive caution which enveloped, then smothered the tie's first game 10 days earlier.

McAllister and Yeboah, but surprisingly there was also room for Speed a month after his fractured cheekbone had necessitated the insertion of three metal plates.

Yet McManaman's progress down the left wing was so effortlessly mesmerising that there was magic in the air every time the ball lay at his feet.

When Leeds' resistance was finally ended after 57 minutes it was at the end of just such a raid.

ferocious blow with his left foot did the rest.

In short McManaman was the difference, and with 18 minutes remaining he struck a second blow, sweeping in marvellously from 13 yards after being fed by Fowler.

Wimbledon 1, Chelsea 3

Hughes ices Chelsea's cup cake

David Lacey

THE prospect of meeting Manchester United in Sunday week's semi-final at Villa Park produced another jolly occasion for Chelsea.

bench, Chelsea's attack needed the Dutchman's strength in the air as well as his other skills.

Nevertheless it was a shot rather than a header from Gullit, driven in fiercely from the right after Wise's square pass had created the chance.

Yet the head of Harford, rising and nodding in support of Gooden and Ekoku, was always going to offer Wimbledon further hope.

Chelsea, however, had Petrescu and after 19 minutes the Romanian's astute timing of a run saw them take the lead.



Off the Mark... Hughes heads wide as Chelsea put Wimbledon's goal under pressure at Selhurst Park last night

net from a narrow angle. With Sullivan pushing a close-range shot from Hughes over the bar, Chelsea appeared to have the initiative.

In the event their start could not have been worse.

near the 18-yard line and produced a thunderous right hook of a shot that rebounded from the post.

Wimbledon, peppering their opponents' penalty with centres and with Jones a curiously stubborn influence in midfield, had their persistence rewarded seven min-

utes before half-time. Harford found Ekoku on the right and Gooden slipped past Chelsea's three central defenders to meet the cross and bring the scores level with the finest of glancing headers.

More Georgian joy for City

THE Georgian influence that is proving so valuable in Manchester City's battle against relegation was strengthened yesterday when the Department for Education and Employment granted a work permit to the striker Mikhail Kinkladze.

Aston Villa in the Coca-Cola Cup final against Leeds United at Wembley on Sunday are looking increasingly slim.

Premiership: Southampton 0, Sheffield Wednesday 1 Saints lose balance on a black Wednesday

SOUTHAMPTON are more adept at avoiding the drop than a high-wire walker, but the safety net was whipped away last night and they are now in grave danger of relegation after 18 years in the top flight.

One Premiership point would have been useful but the fact that all three slippers were off was imperative that Saints learned how to win again last night, with matches to come against their fellow strugglers Coventry and Queens Park Rangers.

Beasant from the edge of the six-yard box.

the moment it is missing and with no one else capable of providing it Woods had quiet night in the Wednesday goal.

Sheridan was booked after 63 minutes for an innocuous challenge on Le Tissier, who moments earlier had glared at Newsome for no apparent reason.

Croft is Blackburn target

BLACKBURN'S manager Ray Harford is ready to launch his promised spending spree by signing Grimsby Town's highly promising full-back Gary Croft, writes Ian Ross.

Todd yesterday lodged a £250,000 offer for Bradford City's goalkeeper Gavin Ward, and although it was rejected Todd is likely to make a higher bid.

Basketball English snub All-Star game

THE All-Star game went ahead in Leicester last night despite a boycott by English players. Seven of the 24 selected refused to appear in the showpiece game in protest at the Budweiser League's decision to remove the limit on the number of foreigners allowed to each club.

The fledgling Basketball Players Association was unable to agree to a total boycott, but Peter Scandebury, Steve Bucknall, Ronnie Baker, Karl Brown, Kevin St Kitts, Dave Gardner and Trevor Gordon — seven of the eight English players selected — held their own protest at what Scandebury, the England forward and BPA president, called "a detrimental decision to English players and English basketball".

Results FA CUP Soccer Sixth round replays Liverpool 3, Leeds United 0

SPRINGHEATH PRINT CAPITAL LEAGUE Barnes 1, Fulham 2; Brentford 2, Reading 1; Cambridge 2, Crawley 1; Peterborough 3.

Ice Hockey @ Fife yesterday relocated a second request by the Asian Football Confederation that Japan and South Korea jointly host the 2002 World Cup finals.

Career that Gerry rebuilt

Ian Ross on how Mark Wright was inspired by a Mersey music idol

THERE are many different aspects to Mark Wright's renaissance. For example, he is probably the only footballer in Britain who can cite a Sixties music idol as an inspiration.

His family and team-mates provided reliable sounding boards but it was the advice and encouragement of a neighbour, Gerry Marsden of Pacemakers fame, which helped him stay afloat.

"I was terrific, he inspired me to come back," Wright said yesterday. "He kept on telling me that I was still a good player and that I should believe in myself. He pointed out I had two young boys who would be proud to see their father play for Liverpool. He gave me a hard time; he was like a father figure to me."

These days Wright's boyish smile illuminates Anfield. It was not always so. In the summer of 1994 it seemed he was being unobtrusively ushered towards the Anfield exit by the harsh words of Liverpool's manager Roy Evans.

Wright... renaissance man

ubs and ad for c

say leader non-Sup



Rugby Union

Clubs and country head for conflict

Robert Armstrong

ENGLAND'S leading clubs are set for a tug of war with the Rugby Football Union for the services of their top players in the build-up to next season's international matches.

Clive Brittle, chairman of the RFU executives, will meet club representatives from Courage Leagues One and Two at London's East India Club today to try to resolve the deadlock over player availability and the scheduling of league and cup fixtures.

However, a club-versus-country conflict over the availability of players in the weekend before each international looks set to undermine the fragile relationship between English First Division Clubs Limited and the RFU.

Significantly, a players' draft contract currently circulating among the clubs seeks to deny the RFU the automatic right to first call on players or for internationals even though that right was affirmed last year in a directive from the International Board.

The issue of player availability could become acute during the 1997 Five Nations Championship when the England management will hold its customary two-day training sessions in the weekend

Another Widnes convert for Sale

SALE signed a second former Wales player who "went North" last night when Adrian Hadley, the recently released Widnes RL winger, switched codes again on a three-year contract.

Like his Widnes teammate and fellow Wales RU cap John Devereux, who is to combine Super League duties this summer with winter rugby union, Hadley will not be seen in Courage League action with Sale until next season.

The 33-year-old Hadley left Cardiff to go professional with Saleford in 1988 after scoring 12 tries in 27 appearances on the wing for Wales.

before each game. At present Pilkington Cup matches are played for the weekends before England face Scotland on February 1 and France on March 1, and there are League One matches before the away games against Ireland on February 15 and Wales on March 15.

The question of who holds each player's contract will be crucial. This season the top players have been contracted solely to the RFU, but that will change this summer when those players have to agree to an employment with their chosen clubs.

about £36,000 each from international rugby this season may decide simply to draw a weekly salary from their clubs without committing their signatures to any contract other than with the RFU.

There could be a clash of interest between the European Cup, which stages its last round of games on November 16, and England's first international of the season, against Italy at Twickenham on November 23.

No English club involved in the latter stages of the competition would be willing to release international players merely for a squad weekend.

On the other hand, no England coach would want to be without key players when preparing his squad for a tough curtain-raiser. Clearly something has to give.

Among other issues certain to keep the pot boiling are the top clubs' insistence on a new contract with BSkyB to transmit European Cup games even though the RFU already has a contract with ITV, and the proposal from the new Rugby Union Players' Association that its members be paid a basic salary of £18,000.

The clubs also want a second-tier European competition. The top clubs have to devise ways of raising £1.5 million each next season just to pay their playing staff a minimum salary and meet running costs.

Yesterday Dick Best, Harlequins' director of rugby, warned that the demand for £18,000 would inevitably lead to a loss of employment with their chosen clubs.

It is likely that members of the England squad will attempt to negotiate dual contracts with club and union in order to retain their freedom to play representative rugby as and when they see fit. Indeed, established England players who have earned

Rugby League

Lindsay leads ARL rebels into non-Super League

Paul Fitzpatrick

JUST when the smoke of a fresh war has cleared in Australia, along comes Global League, a 10-team competition announced to start on the same day as the European Super League, March 29.

Global League would be run by and for the benefit of the 311 "rebel" players who signed contracts with Rupert Murdoch's Australasian Super League and who now refuse to play under the Australian Rugby League banner.

On Monday Lindsay appeared the players might be willing to rejoin the ARL competition, however reluctantly, but the conciliatory mood changed when almost half their 15 "peace" proposals were rejected.

Global League would consist of 10 teams: the two New Australian clubs, Hunter Mariners and Adelaide Rams, plus eight from the areas of the Super League clubs.

There would be 18 rounds of competition, followed by a play-off by the top five clubs which in turn would be followed by a world play-off involving European clubs.

Global League would have no connection with Murdoch's News Corporation, said Lindsay. But it sounds like Super League by another name, and under the terms of Justice Burchett's rulings it may be illegal.

Although Global League can only complicate matters, there were still some hopeful signs yesterday including a long round of talks which involved all 20 established clubs. Afterwards the rival factions were said to be closer to agreement than for a long time.

If agreement is reached it will almost certainly come too late to prevent many club-finding week sides when the new ARL season, three weeks behind schedule, finally gets under way tomorrow.

He denied that the competition had been arranged before the breakdown of compromise talks between the Super League players and the ARL.

"This alternative competition was not the preferred option but it will now be a genuine Super League premiership," he said.

For this is where the mechanical man of golf comes in for maintenance or, if necessary, overhaul. This is where perfect practising conditions are no more than a short golf

Sport in brief

Weightlifting

The British lifter Peter May has been banned for life after testing positive for an anabolic steroid. He was one of several lifters who were positive at last November's world championships in China, where he finished 15th in the 200lb class.

Last night the International Weightlifting Federation would confirm only the suspensions of May and Germany's Stephanie Utseh because it was still waiting for results of the B-sample analysis in the other cases.

Bowls

England's Tony Alcock and Andy Thompson stayed on course for a semi-final place after the third day of the world championships in Adelaide when they coasted to a 29-9 win over Guernsey's Jon Gwypel and Bernie Sizoon.

Badminton

The first foreigner employed on a full-time basis in the 103-year history of the Badminton Association of England was announced yesterday, writes Richard Jago.

The system has one point per rally up to nine, with a hi-breaker at 8-8. England's Mark Chaloner will take on Pakistan's World Open champion Jansher Khan today.

Table Tennis

England may be without their two leading players for a crucial European Men's League Super Division relegation play-off with Poland at Blunney tonight. Matthew Syed, the England No. 1, faces a fitness test on a hamstring problem and Chen Xinhua is in China on business and may not reach the venue in time.

Cricket

Ruling blow for Emburey

JOHN EMBUREY, who recently joined Northamptonshire as coach, was given the freedom to play for his new county yesterday but with a qualification rule that could still force him to retire from the first-class game.

The 43-year-old off-spinner, who left Middlesex during the winter after 22 seasons, has been told by the Test and County Cricket Board that he can play only as a List One registration.

Emburey, who won his 64th Test cap last summer, has been confirmed as List One because he was offered a two-year contract by Middlesex. Coach and county must now decide whether his on-field qualities, and his age, justify them using one of only two List One registrations allowed in any five-year period.



Someone mechanical to watch over me... Faldo putts. Leadbetter assesses, and the drive for a sixth major title goes on

Why Faldo stays on for headbanging with Ledd

David Davies reports from Orlando, Florida, where golf's most celebrated swing guru is on emergency extra duties this week

NICK FALDO stood on the 18th tee in last Wednesday's Bay Hill pro-am, finishing off a not particularly distinguished round. Two video cameras were trained on him, one from behind, the other from the side. He hit his tee shot, watched it finish, and then as his amateur partners went through their motions he watched the instant playback of his swing. Then the other camera's tape was viewed and analysed in its turn.

This was Orlando, home last week to the Bay Hill Invitational but home every week to the David Leadbetter School of Swing Dissection, Redistribution and Resurrection. Its leading pupil is of course Faldo, and for him the week of the Bay Hill event represents seventh heaven. Faldo is a four-iron to 12 feet, into a breeze, over a lake, really rather ordinary. It is almost unhealthily obsessive, a search for a level of perfection that cannot exist in an action with so many moving parts and performed by a human being

free his mind from the memory of six missed greens in the first round, all through pulled second shots. And so the analysis goes on. He had rid himself of the cause of those pulled shots he replied: "Not officially." That meant a cure had been effected but it was something he had worked out for himself and it had not yet received the official benediction of Ledd.

For Ledd was the man he turned to for a complete restructuring of his game in 1985, after two years in which he had won six tournaments. He has since won five majors — although, worryingly for him, not one since 1992. Faldo is simply never satisfied. Two weeks ago he started the Honda Classic with a 77 and finished with three successive rounds of 68. Had he started with a level-par round he would, on that form, have tied the winner, Tim Herron. Yet he cannot

for most of the past 15 years Faldo's obsession has meant that he has been surrounded by himself and it has not yet received the official benediction of Ledd. Now it seems that by taking up with Brenna Cepelak, a single-figure player who was on the Arizona university golf team, he has slammed shut even that window. There is no one close to him who cannot talk, or indeed would not prefer to talk, about pronation, supination, rotation; about birdies, bogeys and pars. And so the obsession goes on.

TV and Sport

Duo with walletful of clout

John Duncan on the Sports Council's leading players

RODNEY WALKER and Derek Casey may not be as graceful as Torvill and Dean, or as idiosyncratic as Clough and Taylor, but few duos in British sport have their power.

In the past two years the pair, respectively chairman and chief executive of the Sports Council, have seen the National Lottery increase their grant-aid budget from £49 million to £300 million, money they have distributed for the future benefit of elite and grassroots sport.

That sum is set to grow even more in the next six months, with a proposed five per cent of all future sports-rights money "top-sliced" and directed to fertilising grassroots sport.

The council has accepted the council's proposed code of conduct for governing bodies and broadcasters after the debate on the Broadcasting Bill.

In the past 12 months the council has been handed the purse strings for the new £200 million national stadium, has been given responsibility for the Government's pet project, the £100 million elite Academy of Sport, and has organised a massive national junior sports programme.

It all seems a long time ago that the council was something of a joke, a black hole of bureaucracy into which good ideas went and were never seen again, an unavoidable nuisance to governments who cared little about sport.

"The day I arrived in my office," said Walker, "the only thing on my desk was a highly critical report from the Public Accounts Committee into the working of some of our subsidiary companies."

The council has had to knock itself into shape quickly. The speed of change in sport in the past 12 months has been quite extraordinary," said Casey. "The lottery, the question of amateurism, and the role of television have all come into play. We have had to adapt and become a more knowledgeable about areas we weren't really involved in before, and at the same time set an agenda and take the lead on things."

Walker's background as a no-nonsense match-fixing policeman — his handshakes borders on an act of aggression — and company troubleshooter for merchant banks has helped.

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Feherty happy to return to the fray after three-month retirement

Michael Britten in Lisbon

THREE months after his retirement to become a commentator for American television, David Feherty relaunches his European career in the Portuguese Open here today.

Feherty, aged 37, is back after a disastrous attempt to establish himself on the US Tour which ended with him losing his card and embroiled in an acrimonious divorce. His home is still in Dallas but he is now an enthusiastic transatlantic

commuter, aiming to regain the Ryder Cup place he secured while winning five European titles and more than £1.5 million in a 15-year campaign.

His new zest for the game stems from the encouragement of the Ryder Cup captain Seve Ballesteros, of his close friend Sam Torrance, and of a Mississippi sales executive, Anita Schneider, whom he plans to marry this year after her Leap Year proposal.

Europe this year but says he might try again to play in the US, where he will be commenting on the US Tour event at Atlanta immediately before the US Masters. "I feel I have something to prove to them," he said.

SportsGuardian

FRENCHMAN'S BRILLIANCE BREAKS GUNNERS' RESISTANCE



Firing on all cylinders... Manchester United's midfielder Roy Keane lets fly and Arsenal's Dennis Bergkamp can only hold a watching brief

Premiership: Manchester United 1, Arsenal 0

Cantona puts United level at top

Cynthia Bateman

THEY deserved it, played brilliantly for it and never looked like falling to win. But one goal was enough to put Manchester United level on points with Newcastle...

but despite United's obvious appetite, by half-time the myriad chances had got them absolutely nowhere. It was compelling viewing nevertheless for the crowd of 50,028...

Bruce galloped forward with the ball. His shot bobbed alarmingly towards Seaman but finished in the goalkeeper's arms. Bruce was partnered in the centre of defence by May...

Giggs shot wide and had another effort turned round the post by the goalkeeper, and Keane's stinging drive was just wide. Then in the 10th minute Keane hit the inside of the far post...

Hillier at half-time, again played just behind them. Only United errors seemed likely to let them in. Phil Neville's clearance early in the second half gave them such a chance...

but was headed out by Linighan. Cantona chested it down and his dipping volley from 25 yards sailed over the massed ranks of blue shirts and dropped behind the keeper...

Lords giveth so V-chip can take away



Vincent Hanna

YESTERDAY I had a word with Tim Collings, who could do a lot for British sport - not to mention British sanity. He is a professor of engineering in Vancouver, and we need his help. I'll get to him in a minute.

The Broadcasting Bill completed its passage through the House of Lords. It now goes to the Commons where, unless the Sports Council gets tough, there will be another big row. The idea, you will recall, is to ensure that the British public has access to great sporting occasions...

I HAVE a copy of the first draft. It has only 10 paragraphs but it could transform the present system, if the Sports Council is prepared to fight for it. It sets out three principles by which the code should operate...

as a minimum contribution for the development of its sport. This should provoke some interesting chat with the Premier League, the Test and County Cricket Board and the Rugby Football League...

THIS is encouraging, and I hope it works. But I must confess that it is only half my problem. Having TV access to major British sporting events is all very well but it does not make them more bearable to watch...

Venables calls Wright

David Lacey

THREE and a half years after playing his last England game under Graham Taylor, Mark Wright looks set to make his first appearance for Terry Venables...

back's comfort in bringing the ball out of defence made that possible, but he did have Des Walker's pace and Terry Butcher's superior defensive qualities alongside him.

goals by the bundle for Blackburn but has not found the net for England in 10 games. Fowler is almost equally prolific but is an unknown quantity internationally...

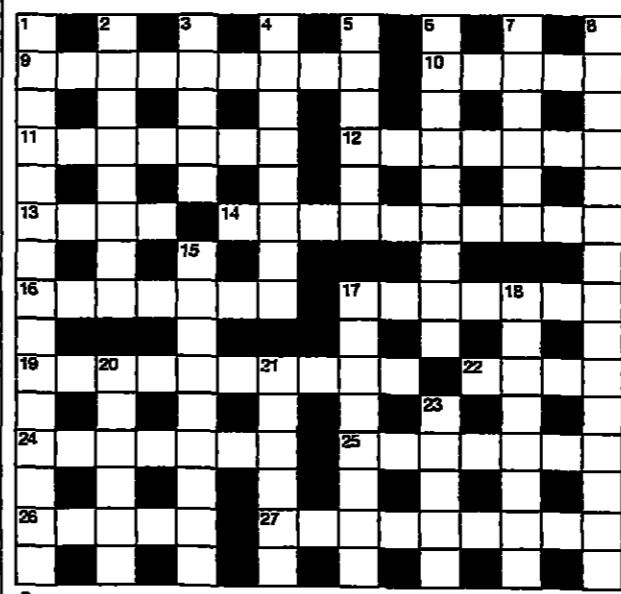
BROTHERS IN ARMS



PHILIP NEVILLE (left), included with his brother Gary in Terry Venables's squad for the Bulgaria game next week, set up the possibility of brothers playing in the same England team for the first time since June 11 1970...

Guardian Crossword No 20,606

Set by Rufus



- Across
9 Not straight and with future too unsettled (3,2,4)
10 Pack animal brings everything back around morning (5)
11 Oriental seen in Chinese city, having a sly look (7)
12 Dot three 's perhaps, many find it silly (7)
13 Cattle without water (4)
14 Capital footwear (10)
15 Play an exaggerated role in a covert organisation (7)
17 One is not bound to enjoy this (7)
19 Their union offers security (4,3,3)
22 Rigid forms of worship (4)
24 Lower speeds ordered on both sides of the river (7)
26 She puts on other people's clothes (7)
27 Peer in uniform (5)
27 They add grace to manners, perhaps (8)
Down
1 Mate takes steps to provide communication between decks (9,6)
2 See great changes in overseas accommodation (8)
3 Join in a fortissimo number (5)
4 Breaking foot, totters a bit (8)
5 It's erected for the reception (6)
6 Matches in leagues (9)
7 A good man in the mine, though too old for the job nowadays (4,2)
8 Coach for trippers? (7,8)
15 An arm put round a pretty girl in game (9)
17 The author is not in (8)



CROSSWORD SOLUTION 20,606

18 Straightening bandages (8)
20 Company show displeasure with failure to accept responsibility (3-3)
21 Order posted by a tyrant (8)
23 Waves on the pools (5)
Solution tomorrow
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It's depressing that the fans have such a Pavlovian response to comebacks. While it's natural to want to see a favourite long-lost group again, one must question the sanity of people who would fork out £100 for a ticket, or £25 for the sub-standard Beatles Anthology 1. Caroline Sullivan on the comeback trail